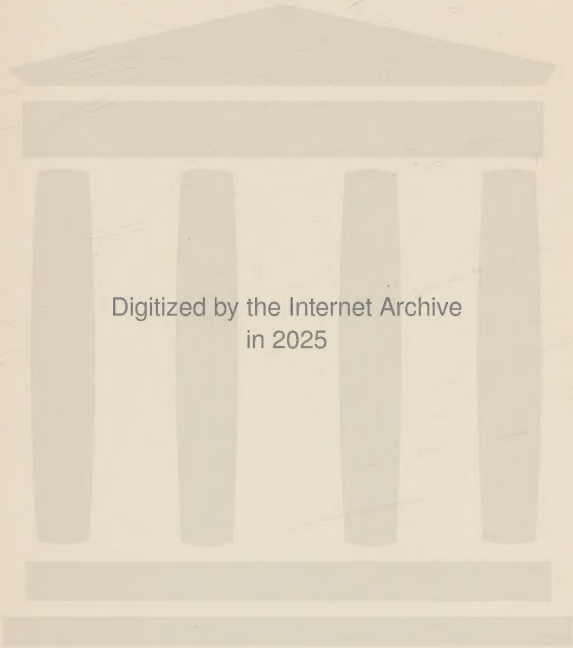
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ESSENTIALS OF POETRY

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Lowell Lectures, 1911

BY

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TO MY MOST SEVERE CRITIC

PREFACE

THE point of view maintained in the present volume was reached in the course of discussions with a class of students of English literature in Harvard University. Much of whatever value the ideas here presented may possess is due to the questions and criticisms offered by members of the class, and by a few friends to whom they have been submitted. The form in which they now appear is practically that in which they were delivered as lectures at the Lowell Institute in the spring of 1911. I have taken some pains to remove the more obvious traces of oral delivery, but I fear that it has not been possible to disguise altogether the didactic tone due to their academic origin.

The problem of the essential nature of poetry may be approached from many directions, and I wish to make it clear that I realize that from other angles other analyses may be made with an equal claim to validity. The choice of the present angle was determined largely by the desire to arrive at some clear and consistent conception of the essence of Romanticism. In some of the most vigorous

critical writing of the day there appears a tendency to charge this phase of art with the whole burden of modern artistic sins, and it has seemed to me that in this attack there was evident a serious lack of discrimination among the various elements roughly grouped under the term. In attempting to separate these elements and to decide which of them could be regarded as really Romantic in any coherent sense of the word, I found it necessary to come to an understanding also with respect to such terms as Classic, Realistic, and Sentimental; and the conclusion of the investigation yielded the view of the constituents of poetry which this volume presents. I am not without hope that some contribution has been made towards that freeing of terminology from ambiguity which is so necessary for the further progress of literary criticism.

Buchenberg im Schwarzwald,
August, 1911.

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ESSENTIALS OF POETRY

CHAPTER I

THE BALANCE OF QUALITIES

I

Modern literary criticism has busied itself much with the definition of poetry. Here was a problem essayed by Aristotle, treated from varying points of view by the Roman rhetoricians, by the critics of the Renascence, by the rule-mongers of the neo-classical period; yet, when, over a hundred years ago, criticism and the appreciation of literature entered on a new phase, a sound basis in the form of a clear understanding of the essential qualities of poetry was still found to be lacking. The attempts of Wordsworth and of Coleridge came as near success as those of any of their predecessors; yet these failed of any wide acceptance among their contemporaries; and the critics of the later nineteenth century continued the quest with unabated zeal. No general agreement, however, can be said to have

been arrived at; and recently the discussion has tended to sheer off in two different directions, leaving the main issue for the moment unsettled. Just as, in the Elizabethan time, Sir Philip Sidney ignored the question of the essential nature of poetry, and, assuming that to be known, sought to ward off the attacks of the Puritans by a dithyramb in celebration of the poet's high aims and glorious achievements, so the writer of to-day meets contemporary interests either by turning aside to search for the physiological basis of all æsthetic enjoyment, poetry included; or, taking poetry as coextensive with rhythmical or metrical utterance, pursues the trail of origins into the misty regions of primitive culture. Contributions of much scientific and historic interest have already been made by scholars along both of these lines; but for the common reader of poetry, eager for an insight that will clarify and intensify his pleasure, something less remote from his immediate conditions is still to be desired.

A final definition of poetry is not to be expected, now or at any future time. For poetry is not simple, but a compound of various elements; and the relative importance of these

elements, even the leadership among them, varies from age to age with the changes of taste and prevailing temperament that characterize the lettered as much as the fickle multitude. They vary not only from age to age, but from class to class, from group to group, and from man to man. The men of the age of Queen Anne demanded and responded to stimuli widely different from those that had stirred their forefathers under Elizabeth, or those that were to stir their descendants in the days of Wordsworth and Scott; the men who cared for the *Lyrical Ballads* were, for the most part, different in taste and temperament from those that acclaimed *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.* Yet this is not to say that what was poetry for one was not poetry for the other, or to run to the extreme that denies the existence of all permanent criteria.

The dilemma here suggested has often been stated, and the history of criticism may be read as an alternation between the men who held, in effect, that poetry is one thing, — what the majority like, what the elect like, or, oftenest, what *I* like, — and those who abandoned as hopeless the search for a standard of judgment, and were fain to admit that

what any man found to be poetry was poetry to him.

What is here proposed is a way out of this dilemma. If poetry be regarded not as a simple product with one essential element, other qualities being merely accidental, but as a composite of a limited number of elements, whose proportions are variable but whose presence is constant, it is possible to face the facts of the variations of taste and of appeal without losing faith in some identity of substance. This will not, of course, give us such a standard of judgment as will enable us to make an absolute ranking of all the poets of the world; for such a ranking involves a degree of stability of taste and temperament that no public is likely to reach, nor, indeed, that any individual is likely to maintain. But it will make it possible to state with some degree of intelligibility the causes why a given poem or an individual poet has appealed to a certain audience, and why a given age and nation has produced a certain type of poetry. Further, in those cases where the consensus of all ages and all types of critic affirms a great master or a great masterpiece, it will become illuminating to observe the relative proportions in

which the constituent elements of poetry are there to be found; and a possibility arises of drawing therefrom criteria for the testing of contemporary judgments and the correction of individual taste.

II

The labels attached to schools and periods in the history of literature are convenient devices for marking off certain broad general distinctions. But their use often results in a kind of misconception analogous to that produced through defining poetry by isolating one of its elements. The definitions given of such words as Classical and Romantic, or Medieval and Renascence, have often led the student to view literary phenomena as possessing a simplicity quite alien to the real nature of such things. Were such words used only to describe tendencies, the danger might not be so great; but when they are applied to periods it should always be remembered that what they describe is not the whole content of the period, but at best only its dominating characteristic. For the qualities and tendencies indicated by such terms as those just instanced are permanent and persistent through-

out all periods and schools. Their forms and manifestations alter, and cause confusion among critics who would measure by rules of thumb the utterances of the human spirit; but the same forces not only recur, but continuously endure. As a theory, this has often been recognized by literary historians; yet their books still profess to describe "the beginnings of classicism" and "the beginnings of romanticism," terms which, if ever applicable, belong only to the dawn of civilization. If the exigencies of text-book-making demand that history be divided into epochs, let it be remembered not only that no hard lines separate these epochs, but that the characteristics which are used to mark them exist before and after, and are chosen for emphasis only because they dominate, but do not extinguish, other characteristics which, for the time, happen to be exhibited with less strength or frequency.

This limitation of the prevalent characteristic may be carried still farther. Not only is no period purely Classical or purely Romantic, but no writer who has expressed his personality with any fullness is purely Classical or purely Romantic. Pope and Johnson had their Romantic moments as surely as Wordsworth

and Keats their classical. And this is due to the fact that these terms indicate effects of which the varying proportions of the constituent elements of poetry are the cause.

III

This view receives corroboration from another fact which is not likely to be questioned upon reflection: that the supremely great writers, and the recognized masterpieces even of writers usually of the second class, are especially difficult to label with the catchwords of any of the schools. It is in a man like Dekker, for example, that one finds Elizabethan Romanticism most clearly exhibited; Shakespeare is too much besides; it is *Götz von Berlichingen*, not *Faust*, that serves as the convenient specimen of a movement. "Perhaps," says a modern writer, *à propos* of ethics, "all theories of practice tend, as they rise to their best, as understood by their worthiest representatives, to identification with each other." A somewhat similar statement could be made of theories of art, and illustrated by works of art. It is the lesser men, or the greater men in their immaturity or in their decline, who show extreme tendencies and invite nick-

names. The supreme artists at their best rise above conflicts and propaganda, and are known, not by the intensity of their partisanship, but by the perfection of their balance. They show the virtues of all the schools; and in them each virtue is not weakened, but supported, by the presence of others which the lesser men had supposed to be antagonistic.

This situation points to the conclusion that the tendencies thus balanced in great art are in themselves perfectly sound, however they may at times seem vicious in the work of the inferior artists; that what has sometimes made Classicism seem a barrenness and Romanticism a disease, is not the positive element in either, but the lack of the supporting and balancing qualities, and the loss of truth or beauty consequent upon the disproportion. The controversial critic who indulges in tirades against either Classicism or Romanticism as the root of all artistic evil, is himself guilty of the vice he is actually, though unconsciously, attacking; for he fails to see that it is not the essential element in either of these tendencies that rouses his protest, but the same lack of balance that distorts his own critical view. Any human impulse that persists from generation to gen-

eration, and under favorable conditions manifests itself in forms of beauty, is unlikely to be essentially vicious. This persistence and these manifestations should rather warn us to avoid wholesale condemnation, and to seek to understand under what conditions, with what checks and complements, such an impulse finds its most beautiful and satisfying expression.

IV

"The best division of human learning," according to Bacon, "is that derived from the three faculties of the rational soul, which is the seat of learning. History has reference to the Memory, poesy to the Imagination, and philosophy to the Reason." [1] Modern representatives of these three forms of intellectual activity object to being confined to the exclusive exercise of one of these functions. The historian now claims the right to reason philosophically and to reconstruct the past with the aid of imagination as well as merely to chronicle memoranda. The philosopher observes facts and uses the imagination to construct hypotheses, as well as reasons. And the poet, as we shall see, extends his province in sim-

[1] *De Augmentis*, book II, chap. 1.

ilar fashion. Yet the threefold division supplied by Bacon, though perhaps not expressed in terms which would satisfy the modern psychologist, is sufficiently fundamental to supply a basis for the discussion of those elements of poetry of which we are in search.

The criticism of antiquity began the inquiry into the nature of poetry, not, like Bacon, by assigning it to the field of imagination, but rather to the memory.[1] The characteristic which Aristotle found to be common to the kinds of poetry he examined — epic, dramatic, and lyric — was that of imitation, and imitation depends primarily on observation and recollection, on what Bacon called memory, on what may be called more comprehensively the sense of fact. But imitation as used by Aristotle and his successors meant much more than the reproduction of what was observed and recorded. The important element of selection plays a large part; and in later criticism we hear much of "ideal imitation," that is, a reproduction of

[1] Memory with Bacon implies not merely the faculty of recollection, but all those mental activities which deal with the apprehension of facts : observation, for example, and the interpretation of the evidence of the senses, as well as mere reminiscence; since history for him included what he called "Natural History," what we call the physical sciences.

facts selected, modified, arranged, and heightened, in order to bring them into accordance with a mental conception. In other words, imagination has taken its place beside the sense of fact: "ideal imitation" is the reproduction in any artistic medium of observed or recorded facts remoulded by the imagination.

The greater part of Aristotle's discussion of the different kinds of poetry concerns, not definitions, but the means by which each kind becomes effective in producing its appropriate sort of pleasure. It is largely critical generalization from the practice of the Greek poets whose works he knew; and it became the basis for almost all future discussion on the formal side of poetry. It is here that we find a place for Bacon's division of reason; for the intellectual qualities necessary for the adept use of the prescribed means to artistic effectiveness are mainly qualities of judgment;—the sense of probability, proportion, fitness, harmony, coherence, and the like. It is on such qualities as these that what we call *form* in art primarily depends; and this group of form-giving qualities will be intended when we speak of the element of reason in poetry.

It will now have become clear that there has

long been a recognition of the existence in poetry of these three fundamental elements of imagination, reason, and the sense of fact. Other factors, of course, enter into the production of poetical effects, and some of those will be taken up later; but there is ground for regarding these three as, in some sense, essential. The *absence* of any one of them is fatal in a way which cannot be maintained of those other subsidiary factors. The *presence* of all three, balanced and coöperating, will be found to characterize those works which a consensus of opinion places in the first rank. The *excess* of any one indicates the presence of a tendency which may not be destructive, but which, while conferring qualities which for a time bring popularity, ultimately stamps the work in which it appears as, in some essential respect, inferior.

V

The particular qualities in poetry which are to be traced to the exercise of each of the three faculties just enumerated may best be perceived by a consideration of classes of poetry in which each in turn may be seen dominant. As soon as this is done, we shall find

ourselves in the midst of familiar classifications, but with, it is hoped, a clearer view of their nature and contents.

The three most persistent tendencies exhibited in the history of poetry are Romanticism, Classicism, and Realism. These terms have been used with a freedom that has often resulted in confusion, and there is no general agreement in defining them; but that the tendencies exist, and are distinguishable in the concrete, seems to be admitted by all. If a correspondence between them and our threefold division of the faculties employed in poetry can be discerned, we shall have made some progress towards definite conceptions. Such a correspondence is revealed by the theory that each of these three tendencies is definable as the predominance of one of the faculties over the other two. Romanticism is the tendency characterized by the predominance of imagination over reason and the sense of fact. Classicism is the tendency characterized by the predominance of reason over imagination and the sense of fact. Realism is the tendency characterized by the predominance of the sense of fact over imagination and reason.

At first sight, such a statement falls under suspicion from its very baldness and simplicity. Literary and artistic phenomena, one is apt to reflect, are hardly to be adequately disposed of by a formula apparently so mechanical. The subject-matter under discussion involves the infinite variety of mood and emotion, the complex interplay of ideas and their hidden associations, the perpetually shifting panorama of mental imagery, which take place in the consciousness when it is confronted with a work of art. And in each separate art there is, in addition, the whole mass of considerations affecting the technical devices by which color, form, and sound are brought into the service of expression. All this, it might be urged, is too complex, too full of minute shadings, to be cleared up by a handful of drastic distinctions.

To this it may be replied that the simplicity of the definitions proposed is more apparent than real. The three important terms employed contain each a central idea, but they have a vast number of manifestations, and are, moreover, practically never found in isolation. In later chapters, the attempt will be made to expound the more important of these

manifestations, and to show that they really belong to the central ideas. But, in the mean time, the argument may be safely followed without the fear that the criticism of poetry is to be rendered either easy or mechanical.

VI

In looking to literary history for some preliminary corroboration of our definitions, it will be well to recall a principle to which allusion has already been made. Just as no poem is created exclusively by the imagination, the reason, or the sense of fact, so no age is exclusively Romantic, Classical, or Realistic. If we yield to current fashion and speak, say, of a Romantic period, let it be understood that this implies only that in that period there was a notable increase in the amount of the imaginative element in the poetical product of the time, not that reason and the sense of fact had completely vanished. Further, the greater the age from the artistic point of view, the less likely is it to be marked by a notable deficiency in any of the three faculties. In so far as it succeeded in giving in artistic form a deep, broad, permanently and universally satisfying representation of human life, it con-

tained in itself, in well-balanced proportion, the three great elements of artistic effectiveness.

It will probably be granted that the period of the Renascence is the most notable age in the history of art and letters, if one regards the breadth of its activity as well as the height of its loftiest achievements. The age of Pericles in Greece, however we may compare Sophocles and Shakespeare, Phidias and Michelangelo, was much more restricted both in point of time and of extent. If our theory is correct, then, we ought to find in the Renascence testimony to the activity, in fair equilibrium, of all the faculties under discussion.

The evidence of the workings of the imagination in this period is not far to seek. Historian after historian has laid stress on the breaking down at that time of the walls which had limited the intellectual vision, and on the growth of an insatiable curiosity, peering out on all sides into the unknown. The records of the century of exploration that followed the discovery of the New World by Columbus are full of the spirit of wide-eyed wonder in which the prows of England and Spain were

pushed into strange seas; and the tales of marvellous adventure brought back by these splendid pirates stimulated to the highest degree the imaginations of those who stayed at home. In a more intellectual sphere, the rebirth of the study of classical antiquity operated with hardly less power on the imaginations of the learned. The spirit of humanism lay in the cultivation of imaginative sympathy with men of all races and times, in the escape through this power from the narrow limits of actual present conditions. The rise of the new astronomy opened to the receptive mind such possibilities of cosmic speculation that even now the imagination reels under the effort to grasp them. These and a hundred other features of that time are the commonplaces of the histories, and are touched on here merely to recall the obvious fact of the unparalleled multiplicity of imaginative stimuli in the Europe of the Renascence.

The activity of the rational element in the life of that time is less prominent, yet by no means absent. The theological thinking of the Protestant Reformation may seem far from pure rationalism to-day, yet, when one considers the Lutheran criticism of the abuse of

indulgences, the logical structure of the Calvinistic system, the wide emphasis laid by Protestantism at the outset on the right of individual judgment, one sees that this religious revolution meant, with whatever else, a profound stirring of the reasoning powers. Nor was this confined to the Reformed party. The movement produced a period of theological controversy, and the impulse to find a reasoned standing ground affected the defence as well as the attack. Some of the factors already cited for their imaginative significance were of importance for the reason also. The Copernican hypothesis was based by its author quite as much on *a priori* reasoning as on observation, and the whole struggle to emerge from the scholastic tradition meant a vigorous assertion of the rational judgment. Along with the broadening of imaginative sympathy from the study of the classics, came an intense, if partial, realization of their beauty of form and style, and a vigorous attempt both to emulate these and to find from the study of Aristotle the laws of literary composition. It is in the commentators of this period that one finds the source of that stream of criticism which carried down to the eight-

eenth century, in however perverted a form, the rationalized æsthetic by which the neo-classical writers sought both to create and to criticize. Reason, then, was abundantly active also.

Nor was the sense of fact lacking to that age. In it the modern sciences of observation and experiment took their rise. With all their far-reaching imaginings and rational speculation, the men of the Renascence had a most vivid and intense sense of the actual. In contrast with the other-worldliness of the Middle Age, it was a very worldly time, when men were by no means inclined to ignore the good things of this life. Science and exploration had their material as well as their imaginative and rational sides; and the abundance of social satire in the literature of the time bears witness of the persistence of the tendency to look facts in the face, and even to take a grim satisfaction in reversing the romantic surface and displaying the seamy side.

VII

It is to be admitted that in any age evidences of all these tendencies could be exposed: the distinction of the Renascence is in the

vigor and intensity of the activity of all of them. None is negligible; and in the high degree of the development of all is to be found one explanation of the full-blooded completeness of the art and literature of the time.

Yet so long a historical digression would hardly be justifiable here, were it not for its importance as a background for the great literary figures of the period. For England, if not for the world, the Renascence culminates in Shakespeare; and, while it is useless to deny or explain away the miracle of genius, it can be shown that the supreme effectiveness of Shakespeare in the picturing of human life finds some explanation in the balance of the elements under discussion, both in his age and in his own temperament.

The most remarkable characteristic of the earliest work of Shakespeare is its Realism. Reasoned adaptation of means to ends in the mastery of form it undoubtedly has, but this is along somewhat conventional lines, and he is, in the main, trying his hand at other men's devices. Imagination is present in the tentative creation of somewhat vague types of character, in the vivid conjuring up of mental images. But these are heavily impressed

by literal recollection. *Venus and Adonis*, the "first heir of his invention," is, indeed, an imaginative working over of a familiar myth, with much attention to technical form; but its most remarkable quality, and that which sets it apart from the mass of similar Elizabethan re-tellings of classical stories, is its vivid sense of fact. Take, for instance, the famous description by Venus of the hunted hare, or the familiar catalogue of the points of the horse of Adonis:

> Round-hoof'd, short-jointed, fetlocks shag and long,
> Broad breast, full eye, small head, and nostril wide,
> High crest, short ears, straight legs and passing strong,
> Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide:
> Look, what a horse should have he did not lack,
> Save a proud rider on so proud a back.

So far as imagination is present in such passages it is that kind of imagination which comes closest to the sense of fact, the power of calling up remembered scenes vividly before the mental eye. The rational element appears chiefly in the careful manipulation of details, and the insertion of fragments of moralizing, like "Danger deviseth shifts; wit waits on fear," suggested by the resourcefulness of the hare. But both of these elements are clearly subordinate to the sense of fact. The passage,

as, indeed, the whole poem, is distinguished by an extraordinary degree of precision in the recording of observed and remembered detail. Here, surely, is what is called Realism.

We turn, now, to a passage written in the midst of his career, from the speech of Ulysses on the necessity of "degree," or rank and order, in *Troilus and Cressida:*

> O, when degree is shak'd,
> Which is the ladder to all high designs,
> Then enterprise is sick! How could communities,
> Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
> Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
> The primogenitive and due of birth,
> Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
> But by degree, stand in authentic place?
> Take but degree away, untune that string,
> And, hark, what discord follows! Each thing meets
> In mere oppugnancy. The bounded waters
> Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
> And make a sop of all this solid globe.
> Strength should be lord of imbecility,
> And the rude son should strike his father dead.
> Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong,
> Between whose endless jar Justice resides,
> Should lose their names, and so should Justice too.
> (I, iii, 101–118.)

In the selection of details and in the phrasing of these lines there is evidence enough of both fact and fancy, but their predominant quality is surely rational. The play in which

they occur, and other plays written about the same time, are full of such reasoned, even argumentative, speeches, and bear ample witness to the strength of Shakespeare's capacity for that highly finished and carefully considered expression of the results of contemplation and generalization on human nature and the ways of the world, which has distinguished the so-called Classical periods of modern literature.

Finally, let us regard for a moment the speech from *The Tempest*, so often quoted as a kind of epilogue to the dramas as a whole:

> Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air;
> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.
>
> (IV, i, 148–158.)

In such a passage the imagination of the poet rises above details of observation and links of argument, and, like an eagle soaring sunwards in vast spirals above the sights and

sounds of the actual world, draws us up and up, till the faculties lose themselves in an attempt to penetrate the infinite. Such are the supreme achievements of the imagination.

My purpose in assembling these quotations from Shakespeare is not primarily to suggest a characterization of the different periods of his production, but to emphasize the existence in it, in a high degree of frequency and intensity, of all the three elements under discussion. Slight reflection will show the possibility of supporting each of these illustrations with scores like it, so that a special pleader for any of the schools could produce evidence which would seem to prove Shakespeare to be Realist, Classicist, or Romanticist. But disinterested consideration will convince us that all of these tendencies are constantly appearing in his work, and that no one of the labels can long seem adequate. In the greatest figure of all, then, we find a confirmation of our theory, that supreme achievement in art is to be obtained only by a balance of qualities.

VIII

So far we have discussed these three fundamental elements of poetry from the point of

view of its production, as characteristics of the age, or as features of the equipment of the writer, producing it. But the analysis is equally valid if regarded from the point of view of the reader. It is to the reader's imagination, reason, observation or recollection of fact, that poetry makes an appeal; and the same classifications may be arrived at by an examination of our personal reactions to poetry, as by a study of the poet's mind. The same particular verdicts may not always be reached, for this other process involves the disturbing element of personal difference, and no two readers are likely to be stimulated to the same degree by any one quality; but the cultivation of the critical habit enables one to detect and make allowance for the excess or defect due to individual bias. It follows, too, that the ideal critic, like the perfect artist, will be marked not by the possession of a single susceptibility of extreme acuteness, but by a proportional development on all sides.

Not that anything less complete than this is useless. Just as we are not always in a mood for the enjoyment of the great masterpiece, but at one time desire the stimulus of highly imaginative work to lift us clear of the

actual, at another the tonic of a reasoned view of large aspects of life, at another a bracing contact with the naked fact; so criticism that is chiefly intent on one or other of these factors has its value also. Herein lies the defence of the so-called "impressionistic" critic, whose work is not primarily an estimate or an analysis at all, but a description of the experiences of certain highly developed sensibilities in contact with a work of art. The confessions of such a writer serve to bring into view qualities in a poem which, while they may not be displayed in their true relations, are yet there, and so develop our sensitiveness to artistic beauty now in this direction, now in that. The chief value of good criticism is, after all, not in supplying us with final verdicts on a book or an author, but in giving us a certain æsthetic gymnastic, which will aid in equipping us with the strength and suppleness of mind and feeling necessary for an effective assault on the kingdom of art on our own responsibility.

The same principles apply in the consideration of the great ultimate, yet hardly articulate, critic, the public and posterity. The distinction must be kept clear between the public

from which a poet springs and the public which appreciates him. Much confusion in the writing of literary history has resulted from the tacit but fallacious assumption that an age is necessarily to be characterized by the art produced in it; yet it is a commonplace that the poet has often been in his own time but a voice crying in the wilderness. William Blake, for example, was contemporary with Dr. Johnson, and has come to his own only after a century. The high poetical production of Wordsworth is separated by a clear space of years from the period of his popularity, though he happened to survive to enjoy it. On the other hand, Scott and Byron found their public at once. In the face of such familiar facts it would seem an obvious duty to be clear in our nomenclature as to whether such a term as "The Romantic Period" is to refer to the age whose artists exhibited the predominance of romantic tendencies, or that in which the public at large showed appreciation of them. The study of vogue as a factor in literary history has little more than begun, and is beset by peculiar difficulties; but, when the facts are once obtained, we shall find still another field for the

application of the principles we have laid down, and shall be able to describe and appraise the public of each successive period by their approximation to the same balance of qualities which determines the place of the individual critic and poet.

IX

In the foregoing enumeration of the fundamental elements of poetry there has been one notable, and, it may have seemed to some, fatal omission. Nothing has been so far said as to *emotion*. Yet in modern discussions of our subject hardly any factor has been more strongly insisted on. Wordsworth, among many illuminating and profound utterances on this theme, has called poetry "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"; and again, speaking of poetry as having truth for its object, he says that such truth must be "carried alive into the heart by passion." Milton, too, in his famous dictum, emphasizes the passionate nature of poetry. And everywhere in the field of recent criticism one may find utterances to the same effect.

But the present thesis does not require us to ignore or minimize the importance of this

factor. It is one of the distinguishing marks of the method of poetry as opposed to that of philosophy and science, that it aims to convince, not the intellect, but the feelings. Yet this is not to place emotion on the same plane as the three elements so far discussed. The prominence of emotion in poetry does indeed vary from poet to poet, and from work to work; yet we do not find it selected as the specific characteristic of any type. It does not belong, as a special possession, to one class or school, but is a general source of poetic vitality in all. The term "emotion," however, as used by Wordsworth and others for the factor under discussion, is not an entirely happy one. It points in the right general direction, but hardly hits the mark. The insistence on it has led to the undervaluation of certain forms of verse, and at times has led to their complete exclusion by the critics from the field of poetry. Yet some of these forms the great public persists in recognizing and welcoming, so that it is worth while to see whether the term is not unintentionally narrow.

The quality aimed at by such writers as Milton and Wordsworth may, I believe, more fitly be termed intensity. The conception

which this word suggests is considerably broader than that indicated by emotion, and more conveniently lends itself to the kind of effectiveness which belongs to the reason and the sense of fact in the service of poetry. The exhilaration that one feels from the absolutely fit word, the zest in the clean-cut outline, the thrill of recognition of the characteristic in a piece of penetrating realism, the sense of repose from perfect balance and harmony in structure — such experiences as these are not at once called up by the word emotion, and are included in what I wish to call intensity. It is the result of the artist's caring immensely about whatever aspect of his work especially appeals to him. Later, after the further examination of the three elements first mentioned, the attempt will be made to indicate in more detail the nature of intensity and of its manifestations in poetry, and to show that while the proportions of imagination, reason, and the sense of fact determine the kind of a poem, intensity determines the degree of its poetic vitality.

In addition to these four fundamental and essential elements, the quality of any single poem is affected by an indefinite number of

minor factors. It is with these that a large part of modern appreciative criticism concerns itself, and it is they which, in great measure, give a poem its individuality, as the major factors determine its family and its poetic rank. Among these, only sentiment and humor are here dealt with. The former raises some of the most difficult yet interesting questions in literary analysis. The relation of sentiment to imagination on one side and passion on the other, the distinction between sentiment and sentimentalism, the association in literary history of sentimentalism with romanticism, the issue between those who find in this tendency a charm and those who brand it as morbid, — these are some of the matters which this topic brings into the discussion.

About the relation of humor to poetry singularly little seems to have been written ; and, so far as I am aware, no serious attempt has been made to define the effect of the one upon the other. "Humorous Poetry" is a heading not unfamiliar in the anthologies, and great poets have also been great humorists; but a question remains to be answered as to how intimate the relation may be. This is not a matter concerning merely the single

passage: it affects the whole question of the poetic standing of such literary forms as the Satire. This clearly is a field in which investigation may be expected to result in the clarifying of our ideas as to the essential content of poetry.

The topics here suggested for detailed consideration are, of course, only a selection, but the selection is not purely arbitrary. An examination of the legitimate content of the critical terms employed in outlining the thesis of the present volume will serve at once to test the validity of that thesis, and to confront us with some of the most vital problems in literary criticism.

CHAPTER II

IMAGINATION IN POETRY

I

A THOROUGH-GOING analysis of the faculty of imagination from the point of view of psychology would carry us beyond our range of inquiry. Our method must be mainly that of concrete illustration.

Imagination is sometimes regarded as being merely the faculty of imaging, of holding before the mind pictures of things which are not actually present to the senses. Such a view fails to distinguish it clearly from memory, and would not entitle it to the place assigned it in our scheme. Imagination stretches beyond memory in both directions: first, it may be present in the original perception of the objects which memory recalls; and, secondly, it is not content with passive recollection, but operates upon the objects recollected. Let us see first how it is present in perception. One knows how a botanist, intent on the observation of objective fact, would note and describe a daisy; not, of course, by an indiscriminate enumera-

tion of details, since he is seeking a basis for rational classification; but without addition, the personal element appearing only negatively, in rejection of the non-significant. Contrast with such a method the process of the imaginative observer, as exemplified in one of Wordsworth's poems on the same flower. These three stanzas are sufficiently typical:

Oft on the dappled turf at ease
I sit, and play with similes,
Loose types of things through all degrees,
Thoughts of thy raising:
And many a fond and idle name
I give to thee, for praise or blame,
As is the humour of the game,
While I am gazing.

A nun demure of lowly port;
Or sprightly maiden, of Love's court,
In thy simplicity the sport
Of all temptations;
A queen in crown of rubies drest
A starveling in a scanty vest;
Are all, as seems to suit thee best,
Thy appellations.

A little Cyclops with one eye
Staring to threaten and defy,
That thought comes next — and instantly
The freak is over,
The shape will vanish — and behold
A silver shield with boss of gold,
That spreads itself, some faery bold
In fight to cover!

The possession of an active imagination prevents the poet from being merely passively receptive or merely selective in his observation; the flower affords him a score of stimulating suggestions, and impels his thought in as many directions. Even while his physical eye was resting on the daisy itself, his mental eye was beholding it transformed now into a shield, now a beggar, now a maiden. Far from making the scientist's endeavor to see it only in its nature as a daisy, the poet eagerly allows himself to be led by his imagination to see it as all kinds of other things. Yet these other things are not arbitrarily chosen, but occur to his mind because they bring into relief, one after another, as each image gives place to its successor, aspects of the daisy's character, so to speak, which would never become visible to the merely scientific observer.

In thus seeking to illustrate how imagination goes beyond memory on the side of observation, we have already illustrated how it surpasses it also on the side of recollection. While some of the comparisons suggested by the daisy are with recollected objects, like the "star with glittering crest, self-poised in air," most are with things which the poet had never

seen with the physical eye. A cyclops, a nun, a lady of the Courts of Love, even a queen crowned with rubies, — these are scarcely to be regarded as his familiar recollections. The observed object, besides stirring associations that call up images of things previously seen, calls up also images due to previous operations of the imagination; and when these are examined, we find that out of the materials supplied by perception and memory, the imagination had already stored the poet's mind with images of new creations, many of them, like the Cyclops, of things which never had any but an imaginary existence.

This "playing with similes" illustrates fairly clearly the phase of imagination which Wordsworth himself distinguished as "Fancy." An allied manifestation may be exemplified by the famous passage from Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes:*

> And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
> In blanched linen, smooth, and lavender'd,
> While he from forth the closet brought a heap
> Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;
> With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
> And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon;
> Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd
> From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one
> From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon.

From one point of view this enumeration seems as material and matter-of-fact as the preserve counter of a grocery warehouse; but from another, one perceives that almost every epithet sends out the imagination on a voyage from which it returns with a freight of associations that enrich the conception far beyond what would be achieved by all the senses stimulated by the actual presence of the objects. And Fez, Samarcand, and Lebanon, names redolent of the spices of the gorgeous East, are brought in at the close, producing a climax of experience in which imaginative and sensuous elements are ecstatically blended.

II

The operation of the imagination, however, does not stop with the presentation to the mind of such sensations, images, and ideas, recollected or invented, as are exemplified in the two poems cited. What Wordsworth himself called the Constructive or Creative Imagination, as distinct from the Recollective Imagination and the Fancy, is something both more profound and more comprehensive. On its perceptive side, it depends on what is usually called insight, the power of penetrating

the ordinary objects of experience, and of perceiving meanings and relations that lie beneath the surface. On its creative side, it reveals these hidden elements, not isolated and at random, but as parts of a new synthesis. For such a synthesis, the word "creation" is more fit than "construction," because in its origin it is spontaneous and intuitive rather than the result of a laborious process of piecing things together. That large envisagement of things in their infinite variety of relation, which is the work of true imaginative vision, is due to a mysterious working together of what has been gathered by the insight and observation of the artist, with the ultimate quality of his personality; and the result is "flashed upon his inward eye," not arrived at by reason or ingenuity.

In the forming of large scientific generalizations and of great philosophic conceptions, the operation of a similar imaginative function has long been recognized; and it is necessary to distinguish these from the characteristic products of the artistic imagination. This distinction is to be found rather in the mode of expression than in the way in which the results are reached. The scientist and the

philosopher may arrive at the illuminating hypothesis at a bound, outstripping for the moment the processes of accumulation and deduction, yet, in setting forth their generalizations, they proceed to support them by the collection of facts or by a series of arguments. The artist, on the other hand, is not concerned with the gathering of evidence, and should never argue. While the goal of the others is a formal law or an ultimate abstraction, the artist abhors the abstract, and implies his generalization in a concrete example. His appeal is sensuous, not intellectual; his function is not to prove, but to make you see, or hear, or feel. Starting from the jumble of heterogeneous detail offered to his senses by the actual world, the poet passes, without tarrying in the region of the abstract, to the presentation to the reader of a group of images, selected, heightened, and arranged so as to suggest a new vision of life. He sees the world, internal and external, in pictures; and he in turn renders it in pictures.

From still another point of view is the word "creation" to be preferred to "construction" in describing this larger result of imaginative activity. The artistic product, whether thought

of as in the mind of its creator or of its appreciator, is more an organism than a building. Its vital formative force comes from within, from the personality of the artist; it results from impulse rather than from calculation; and it is governed by a law of self-consistency and coherence whose sanctions are internal. Thus it is entirely in the competence of the individual artist to determine how far his ideal world is to conform to the natural world as known to science or history; the only restriction binding him being that of playing his game according to its own rules. If he elects to work out his problem on the assumption that this or that element usually regarded as supernatural or impossible is for him natural and possible, he is at liberty to do so, as long as the work is true to the laws of its own being. If he elects to deal with a world entirely under the domination of natural law, again he may do so, but waives his right to introduce the supernatural. The city of Paris in Zola's novel of that name, and the City of Brass in the *Arabian Nights*, are equally justifiable subjects for a work of imagination; only magic carpets must not be laid in the cafés of the Boulevards.

Imagination in the modern sense of the term is not supposed to have entered critical discussion until about the second century of our era; yet it is not difficult to find recognition of some of the processes we have been discussing, in the works of Aristotle himself. "Poetry," he says in an oft-quoted passage in the *Poetics*, "is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. By the universal I mean how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity." What is emphasized here is the comprehensiveness of the imaginative synthesis; and when the complementary point is added, that the universal is to be expressed through the individual, we have a statement of the main function of imagination in art. An equally famous dictum of Aristotle's, that the poet "should prefer plausible impossibilities to improbable possibilities," is only another form of the demand for the organic nature of the imaginative creation.

As the minor operations of the imagination in poetry were illustrated from Wordsworth's lines *To the Daisy*, we may turn to the same

poet for an instance of its larger activities. The *Lines written above Tintern Abbey* are perhaps the richest expression, in moderate compass, of Wordsworth's characteristic imaginative interpretation of Nature. In the account there given of his spiritual development, we learn how he mounted by successive stages to an ever larger and more comprehensive view of the natural universe, the range of his vision ever widening as his insight grew more profound, until he

> learned
> To look on nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth ; but hearing oftentimes
> The still, sad music of humanity,
> Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
> To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ;
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.

Here we have the poet grappling with an almost cosmic range of phenomena, yet with superb power, and an unsurpassed majesty of expression, re-creating them as parts of a vast

imaginative conception. The passage quoted, though remarkably free from pure abstraction, considering the theme, yet hardly does justice to the poem as a whole, which contains elsewhere, in its vivid sketches of natural scenery, the element of the concrete which, as we have stated, belongs to full imaginative expression.

Such an illustration, however, is not without danger; for its very extreme of universality, though related to an individual experience, may tend to confirm the impression, easily gathered from discussions on the universal element in art, that poetry cannot reach great imaginative heights unless when its relation to the great problems of life is explicitly treated. But in such a poem as Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* we have no wrestling with spiritual questions, no lofty solution of the problem of conduct found through brooding on the beauties of nature. Instead, a thousand impressions received from the senses, from records of Oriental travel, from numberless romantic tales, have been taken in by the author, dissolved as in a crucible by the fierce heat of his imagination, and are poured forth a molten stream of sensuous imagery, incal-

culable in its variety of suggestion, yet homogeneous, unified, and, despite its fragmentary character, the ultimate expression of a whole romantic world. In such a creation, no less than in the lofty spiritual and ethical contents of a *Divine Comedy* or a *Faust*, may we see imagination accomplishing its characteristic work.

III

But the imagination operates in poetry in still another fashion, in which the process is neither that of "playing with similes," nor the construction of ideal syntheses or extra-natural worlds, but appears rather in its capacity to call up in the reader the consciousness of a peculiar mood, or atmosphere, or ecstasy. Great imaginative verse has often a power of moving us to depths of our nature so profound that we can only vaguely grope after the forces which stir us. One hesitates to attempt to describe these results in precise terms, lest in the process limitations should be implied which would contradict the very qualities one is seeking to express. The method of the concrete example is safest here. In such passages as

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come :

Ah, sunflower, weary of Time !

The wan Moon is setting behind the white wave,
And Time is setting with me, oh :

I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,
Who died before the god of love was born :

there is this in common, that all deal with the conception of Time; Time ever-coming and ever-going, without beginning and without end, awful, irresistible, infinite. Parallel to this is the idea that does most to give *Paradise Lost* its elevation and its power, the ever-present sense of the immensity of space —

a dark
Illimitable ocean without bound,
Without dimension ; where length, breadth, and highth,
And time and place are lost . . .
. . . this wild Abyss,
The womb of Nature, and perhaps her grave.

The *Prometheus Unbound* of Shelley is thronged with passages that thrill with the same suggestion :

On the brink of the night and the morning
My coursers are wont to respire,

sings his Spirit of the Hour.

Emotions of a similar intensity are roused by the idea of Death. So Nashe in his *Litany:*

> Brightness falls from the air ;
> Queens have died young and fair ;
> Dust hath closed Helen's eye :
> I am sick, I must die.
> Lord, have mercy on us !

Or by the idea of Fate, as in Drummond's lines :

> If crost with all mishaps be my poor life,
> If one short day I never spent in mirth,
> If my spright with itself holds lasting strife,
> If sorrow's death is but new sorrow's birth,
> If this vain world be but a sable stage
> Where slave-born man plays to the scoffing stars —

Or by the human powers that make a brave fight against Time and Death and Fate, like beauty or the will of man :

> Was this the face that launcht a thousand ships
> And burnt the topless towers of Ilium ?
> Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss. . . .
> O thou art fairer than the evening air,
> Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars !

In these familiar passages, which I have brought together on account of their lofty and unmistakable imaginative quality, there is, of course, abundant evidence of sheer technical mastery over the means of expression. The choice of figure and epithet, the splendor of

diction, the delicate manipulation of consonant and vowel, the superb cadences of the verse are all in themselves such as to excite our æsthetic sensibilities by their pure beauty of form. But these technical means are not justly estimated if we treat them as separable from the substance of the poems which they express. This substance, as we have noted in the groups in which I have arranged the selections, has this characteristic in all of them, that it deals with the great simple things that are fundamental in human life. In such passages it is not always the case that the elemental conceptions are so explicit as in those just cited; but it appears that the supreme power of imagination is manifested especially when it is concerned, directly or indirectly, with such conceptions. We may not be able to perceive it in all instances; but the more one dwells on the nature of the poetic experience, the more is one inclined to believe that a prime function of the poetic imagination is to reveal, to the emotions if not always to the intellect, the essential relation of all the phenomena with which it deals to the ultimate realities of life and death and the universe. The sense of contact with the infinite which is thus

brought home to us may have either of two effects on our spirits. In its presence, man as a physical being may feel himself dwarfed and depressed, so absurdly minute and futile is he in comparison with cosmic forces and the great mysteries of existence. But this effect may be overcome if he becomes aware of himself as a part of Nature, and, entering with buoyant sympathy into her processes, beholds joyously and with no alien detachment the marvel of the springtime, and the never-ending renewal of life. It is overcome, too, when he realizes his dignity as a spiritual being. Then the consciousness that by virtue of his higher nature he has himself a kinship with the infinite, produces in him a splendid exhilaration, rising into pure ecstasy, and thus affording the loftiest experience which the artistic imagination has to bestow.

CHAPTER III

IMAGINATION AND ROMANTICISM

The foregoing account of the manifestations of the imagination in poetry is of necessity fragmentary and inadequate, but it may serve to indicate with sufficient definiteness the senses in which the term will be used when we turn now to consider the validity of the proposition that in the predominance of this faculty lies the essence of Romanticism.

No term in æsthetic criticism is so loosely used as Romanticism, none so variously defined. It has been employed to describe the unearthliness of Blake and the earthliness of Crabbe, the democracy of Burns and the feudalism of Scott, the faith of Wordsworth and scepticism of Byron, the literalism of Thomson and the landscapes, flooded with "the light that never was on sea or land," that hover in the background of the spiritual visions of Shelley. The attempt to bring order and some unity of conception into this chaos requires no small degree of courage.

Among the host of definitions that have

been offered there are three that have been especially persistent. Heine, speaking of the Romantic School in Germany, finds the heart of the movement in the return to the Middle Ages. French critics have laid especial stress on the growth of the subjective element, and speak of the "rediscovery of the soul" and the "rebirth of the spiritual." In England, the favorite phrase has been the "return to Nature," with a special reference to the increased prominence, in the poetry of the time, of direct description of external beauty. All three aspects, and many others, are found in all three countries, sometimes in separate groups, sometimes in the work of one man. They are, therefore, not mutually exclusive, nor, even if taken together, do they comprehend the whole variety of tendencies to which the name Romanticism has been applied. Yet they are sufficiently representative to serve as starting points from which we may proceed to test the adequacy of the formula proposed. It will be found that the definitions just alluded to, and many others of a similar kind, all fall short of success, because they seize upon certain results and manifestations of the tendency, and mistake these for the force that lies behind.

I

The conception of Romanticism as Medievalism is suspicious in its very simplicity. The detection of Romantic elements in any art, in any period, would become delightfully easy, it would seem, if we had only to look for the appearance of the characteristics of the Middle Ages. But this simplicity begins to disappear as soon as we ask what were the characteristics of the Middle Ages. If we turn to the historian for an answer to this question, we find at once that the Middle Ages were as complex in their characteristics as they are vague in their chronological boundaries. This period is not to be thought of as a term of years during which the intellect of Western Europe was either stationary or all of one type. The more one studies the Middle Ages, the less simple they become, and the less fitted to supply a convenient adjective for the labelling of a single artistic tendency.

A single instance from medieval literature will make this clear. Story-telling was a favorite recreation of an age of slow journeys and abundant leisure, and a vast body of tales of all kinds has come down to us. Among these

one finds a fairly well-defined type which one can imagine to have formed the chief amusement of travellers, as they sat round the inn fire. A considerable number of these stories were taken up by poets, and in their verse form are known as Fabliaux. The typical situation in the Fabliau concerns the intrigue of a monk or priest with the wife of a layman, and the joke may be at the expense of any one of the three. The spirit of these tales is lightly cynical, their tone non-moral, their method thoroughly realistic. The manners are pictured from contemporary life, and neither in motive nor in characterization is there more than a bare minimum of idealization. The Tales of the Miller and the Reeve in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are good specimens. Here is a characteristic medieval product, yet no one, surely, would regard it as romantic.

This is only one example of many; and the inference is clear that before "medieval" can be of any service in describing romantic tendencies, it is necessary to discriminate. For there are to be found in the literature and art of the Middle Ages abundant phenomena that explain, if they do not justify, such a dictum as that of Heine's; and to one of these we can

find a clue in the very word "romantic" itself. Its characteristic application at the beginning of the eighteenth-century revival seems to have been due to the interest in the great medieval romances of adventure, represented in Germany most prominently by the work of Wolfram von Eschenbach. The most striking point of contrast between these works and the art of the eighteenth century lies in the superabundance of imagination. Not only was the more modern reader stimulated by the remoteness and strangeness of the civilization represented; not only did the romances contain a large element of the miraculous and the supernatural; but the dominant spirit of these extraordinary narratives was that of endless aspiration, of the ideal quest, of devotion to objects presented by the imagination: knightly honor, the chivalric attitude towards woman, a fervid if external loyalty to the church. It may be that these aspirations found but a poor degree of realization in the actual life of the time: that by no means weakens the claim that the romances were in a high degree imaginative, and that it was their imaginative quality that roused the interest and sympathy of the modern romanticists.

The predominance of imagination in this branch of secular literature finds its parallel in the religious thought of the Middle Ages. To the existence of the element of reason, the close and subtle argument to be found in the vast tomes of the Schoolmen bears ample witness; but it was not to the Aristotelian theology of that time that the eighteenth century returned. It was rather to the Platonic tradition; to the element of mysticism and asceticism; to that side of medieval religion which despised the actual world, mortified the flesh, and turned its yearning gaze to the invisible and eternal. From religion this spirit passed to religious art; and in the rhapsodies of the books of devotion, in religious lyric and allegory, in the endless paintings of Christ and the Virgin, in the architecture of the churches, one finds the same reaching through and past the actual and attainable towards ideals held glimmering by the imagination before the eyes of the soul. Hence arises in the art of this period the peculiar glory of the imperfect, testifying to no low standards, but rather to a divine discontent with what can be perfectly achieved, in comparison with the dimly apprehended but infinitely loftier objects of the spiritual vision.

No one, in our time, has expressed this quality in medieval art more effectively than Browning. In one of his poems[1] he contrasts the perfection of Greek sculpture with the unfulfilled ideals and the crude technic of the medieval painters, the superb Apollos and radiant Aphrodites with the haggard Christs and wan Madonnas.

Growth came when, looking your last on them[2] all,
You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day
And cried with a start — What if we so small
Be greater and grander the while than they?
Are they perfect of lineament, perfect of stature?
In both, of such lower type are we
Precisely because of our wider nature;
For time, theirs — ours, for eternity.

To-day's brief passion limits their range;
It seethes with the morrow for us and more.
They are perfect — how else? they shall never change:
We are faulty — why not? we have time in store.
The Artificer's hand is not arrested
With us; we are rough-hewn, nowise polished:
They stand for our copy, and, once invested
With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.

'T is a life-long toil till our lump be leaven —
The better! What 's come to perfection perishes.
Things learned on earth, we shall practise in heaven:
Works done least rapidly, Art most cherishes.
Thyself shalt afford the example, Giotto!
Thy one work, not to decrease or diminish,
Done at a stroke, was just (was it not?) "O!"
Thy great Campanile is still to finish.

[1] *Old Pictures in Florence.* [2] The Greek sculptures.

This is nothing but the plea for the supremacy of the imagination, for the romantic with its aspiration and incompleteness, against the classic with its limitations and perfections.

With every great movement for the revival of neglected factors in life and art, there is likely to be found an accompaniment of insincerity and cant. Stupid and shallow people will associate themselves with what promises to be the coming thing, and will degrade a noble enthusiasm into a petty fad. They will fail to catch the spirit, and, seizing hold of externals, will confuse issues and tend to discredit the new gospel by vulgarizing its symbols.

Of this general tendency there are abundant instances in the history of modern Romanticism, and to these is due no small part of the confusion which we are seeking to remove. The work of Horace Walpole gives a good illustration. By temperament and habit Walpole was a type of the elegant man of fashion and taste in a restrained and prosaic age; yet he happened to have the hobby of making "Gothic" collections, and he built a mansion with what he supposed were medieval battle-

ments. He also wrote a tale full of what was supposed to be medieval atmosphere, in which he revelled in subterranean passages, cowled monks, mysterious ruins, gigantic armor, and the whole paraphernalia of cheap supernaturalism. Yet in all this there is little that is really medieval, little genuine enthusiasm for the true spirit of any aspect of the life of the Middle Ages, and, in spite of the superfluity of unreality, little real imaginative vitality. No student of the Middle Ages will object to our calling it pseudo-medievalism; those who have followed the argument thus far will agree that it is also pseudo-romanticism. And under the same condemnation must be placed the greater part of that litter of which *The Castle of Otranto* is usually regarded as the parent: the "Gothic romances" of Clara Reeves and Mrs. Radcliffe, such as *The Old English Baron* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the "terror" novels and dramas of "Monk" Lewis, and their relatives on both sides of the Channel, so admirably satirized in the parodies of the *Anti-Jacobin* and in the *Northanger Abbey* of Jane Austen.

A grave defect of the histories of the romantic revival is the listing of all this rub

bish as evidence of the growth of Romanticism. Evidences in a sense they are, instances they are not; for they lack the essential element, a dominant and vital imaginativeness. They are the uninspired product of imitation, ignorance, and a misapplied ingenuity; concoctions, not growths; using the mere externals, such as furniture, costumes, armor, architecture, archaisms of speech and of belief, for the setting forth of a pretended picture of a civilization whose spirit they neither shared nor comprehended. We still await the historian of the medieval revival who shall treat this whole matter with discrimination; and who, with a real knowledge of the Middle Ages and their imaginative life, will separate the true from the false in the art that claims that age as the source of its inspiration.

An instance on the other side will complete our present treatment of this part of the subject. The novels and romances of Sir Walter Scott employ lavishly the external trappings so familiar in the "Gothic romance," though he was too good an antiquary to fall into the frequent absurdities of the writers who were in some sort his predecessors. But his claim to be a true medievalist and a genuine Roman-

ticist does not depend on his archæology, but on the vitality of his imaginative reconstructions, the reality of his imaginative sympathy. No reader of Scott's life will deny that his ruling passion was the sense of honor. Such incidents as that of the proposed duel with General Gourgaud, and his conduct after the failure of his publishers, exhibit the application of the spirit of the age of chivalry to the life of a modern author. His pride of ancestry, his ambition to found a family, the feudal element in his personal relations, are all redeemed from the charge of snobbishness by the touch of imagination. For him the reason and the sense of fact were elements in life and literature to which common sense demanded a respectful attention; but it was from the highly colored vision of a bygone age that he drew his positive inspiration.

To sum up: the elements in medieval life and art that have provided stimulus to modern romantic writers have been those which, whether secular or religious, were marked by a high degree of ideal aspiration; in other words, by ruling conceptions in which the dominant power is imagination. By virtue of this, the revival of certain aspects of medievalism, when

genuinely sympathetic and not merely external and imitative, may be regarded as a true phase of Romanticism.

II

We turn now to the conception of Romanticism as subjectivity. It is entirely natural that in France we should find the chief stress laid on this aspect. After the terrible cataclysm of the Revolution and the years of turmoil which succeeded the downfall of the old régime, when men were worn out by the endless vicissitudes of external affairs, when hope of justice and stability was all but abandoned, the soul of man, tired and battered in its search for peace, turned in upon itself. It was but one phase of the permanent tendency of humanity, in periods of great calamity, to seek in the spiritual realm the solace and satisfaction which the world refuses to give. The waves of religious and superstitious emotion which pass over nations after great pestilences and devastating wars, are only another manifestation of the same impulse. In the France of a hundred years ago we find not only an external reëstablishment of Catholicism as a part of the policy of Napoleon, but a much more profound

and intimate revival of religion in the movement typified by Châteaubriand in his *Génie du Christianisme*. This movement was not primarily theological. Those who shared in it were still suffering from the reaction against the arid rationalism of the age of Voltaire, which had culminated in the negations of the Revolution; the satisfactions they were seeking were imaginative, emotional, sentimental.

From this turning from the external to the internal world, there resulted a vastly increased sense of the importance of the individual soul, and from this many of the most noted features of the literature of the time. In poetry, for example, the most characteristic result of this subjectivity, this moving of the centre of interest from society to the individual, and, in the individual, to his moods and emotions, was the predominance of lyric. Of all forms of literature, the lyric is that most purely the outcome of the desire for self-expression. Its essence is the outpouring of personal emotion, the utterance of individual mood, — yearning, suffering, joy, or regret; not in general by a story, or through the mouth of a dramatic character, or by description, or by argument, but by a direct cry forced

from the heart of the poet by sheer internal pressure.

The prevailing mood of the eighteenth century, as has often been noted, was alien to all such utterance. The strong social element in the life of the time, the weight of convention, the horror of eccentricity and excess, all tended to suppress the impulse to direct personal utterance; and, as a result, the lyric forms withered. In England, the sonnet, most concentrated of these lyric forms, all but disappeared; the ode became a procession of abstractions draped in flowing garments, personifications without personality; the song was a frigid assemblage of outworn metaphors, — chains and charms and flames, — a herbarium, not a garden.

Let us make this more clear in our recollection by a typical example. Here is a poem by Samuel Rogers, a good specimen of the eighteenth-century method and spirit, though the author lived far into the nineteenth.

TO A TEAR

Oh! that the Chemist's magic art
  Could crystallize this sacred treasure!
Long should it glitter near my heart,
  A secret source of pensive pleasure.

The little brilliant, ere it fell,
Its lustre caught from Chloe's eye;
Then, trembling, left its coral cell, —
The spring of Sensibility!

Sweet drop of pure and pearly light!
In thee the rays of Virtue shine,
More calmly clear, more mildly bright,
Than any gem that gilds the mine.

Benign restorer of the soul!
Who ever fliest to bring relief,
When first we feel the rude control
Of Love or Pity, Joy or Grief.

The sage's and the poet's theme,
In every clime, in every age;
Thou charm'st in Fancy's idle dream,
In Reason's philosophic page.

That very law which moulds a tear,
And bids it trickle from its source,
That law preserves the earth a sphere,
And guides the planets in their course.

Given the technic, and the scientific information about attraction and gravitation so ingeniously employed in the last stanza, these lines might have been written by any man, to any weeping woman, anywhere, at any time. Despite the mention of "my heart," the poet remains decently in the background; and we are presented with a series of elegant reflections on weeping, without a touch of person-

ality. The poem throughout is general, objective, and rational.

Contrast with this a typical romantic utterance by Keats:

> When I have fears that I may cease to be
> Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
> Before high pilèd books, in charactery,
> Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain;
> When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
> Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
> And think that I may never live to trace
> Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
> And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
> That I shall never look upon thee more,
> Never have relish in the faery power
> Of unreflecting love; — then on the shore
> Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
> Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

Here we have the romantic poet profoundly occupied with himself, plunged in dejection at the thought of the possibility of his dying before his time, viewing the world and his love purely from the point of view of what he has to lose in leaving them, and deeming the spectacle of his private tragedy worthy of being given to the world in splendid verse. Apart from the negative difference, the freedom from the checks and inhibitions which would have made such a personal exposure impossible to a writer of the school of Pope, there is present

here a positive element, an implicit faith that such intimate matters are really important and worthy of artistic expression, an intuition that the magnitude of such spiritual experiences is not to be judged by the social or political unimportance of the sufferer.

Assuming that we are now clear as to what is meant by the subjectivity that some have chosen to regard as the essence of Romanticism, we have to inquire into the possibility of harmonizing this view with the theory that that essence lies in the predominance of imagination.

A main reason for refusing to take Subjectivity and Romanticism as equivalent terms is the fact that subjective utterances are by no means always romantic. Sentimental literature, for instance, with its nursing of emotion and cultivation of mood for the sake of egoistic enjoyment, is essentially subjective, yet it is to be distinguished from romantic literature. This sentimental activity does, indeed, often involve the imagination, but uses it as a servant, not as a master. It is merely a tool in the service of feeling; but feeling is the predominant element in such literature.[1]

[1] For a further discussion of this point, see chapter VII.

On the other hand, Romanticism always has a subjective element because of the nature of its dominant factor, imagination. All the various activities of this faculty, from the poet's observation of a daisy to his revelation of Eternity as the refuge of the soul, are determined by the personality of the artist. "Art," says Emerson, "is Nature passed through the alembic of man." We would modify this when speaking of highly imaginative art, and say, "passed through the alembic of *a* man." As opposed to reason, whose syllogisms are supposed to be valid for all intellects, and the sense of fact, which deals with things as they are, external and unmodified by personality, imagination is essentially subjective. My reason, so far as it is purely rational, is everybody's reason; the facts I perceive, so far as they are mere facts, are anybody's facts; but my imagination is my own. Imagination is the function which interprets the universe in the terms of a single soul. Even with respect to artists like Shakespeare and Scott, who are often taken as types of the objective writer, as opposed to subjective lyrists like Shelley, we find ourselves speaking naturally of "the world of Shake-

speare" or "the world of Scott," thus implicitly asserting that their imaginative presentation of phases of human life is stamped with the impress of their personality.

If, then, we find personality to be thus an essential element in the framing of all ideal conceptions, it follows that a certain amount of subjectivity will be found in all highly imaginative writing; and that, in a period in which imagination is predominant, poetry will naturally exhibit a strong tendency to be self-conscious and introspective. Or, looking at it from the other end, in an age when external events are such as to harass and distress, and to deprive the individual of the sense of stability and peace, when traditions are destroyed and the ancient landmarks are removed, we see how natural it is for the sensitive soul to turn from the external world to the internal, from the actual to the ideal, and to express its yearnings and its aspirations in the type of poetry called romantic.

It thus appears that in the view of Romanticism which lays stress upon subjectivity and introspection there is no fundamental error, only a stopping short in thinking the matter through. When it is perceived that this sub-

jectivity is often a consequence of imaginative activity, it becomes clear that it takes its place alongside of the interest in medieval idealism as a phase of the predominance of imagination.

III

The "Return to Nature" has obviously as many meanings as the word Nature itself, and this ambiguity appears in the varied applications which have been made of it in the course of literary history. Thus, many of the most important lines of activity in the period of the Renascence and the Reformation might be described as returns to nature, and some of them were so described. The results of the study of anatomy in the art of Michelangelo were, in contrast with the conventional modelling of the human figure by the medieval artists, a return to nature. The new astronomy inaugurated by Copernicus, with its partial attempt at beginning with facts instead of preconceived theories, was a return to nature. The new science of Bacon, with its stress upon observation and experiment in place of Aristotelian deduction, was a return to nature. The luxurious life of many of the great prelates

of the Renascence, with its intense enjoyment of the harvest of the senses — the kind of thing so vividly portrayed by Browning in *The Bishop orders his Tomb in Saint Praxed's* — was, in contrast with medieval asceticism, a return to nature. When Martin Luther married a wife, it was a return to nature after the celibate ideals and practices of the medieval church. Any reassertion of their existence and their rights by neglected or suppressed elements in human nature, after a period of convention and restraint, is a return to nature; and in this the Renascence in great measure consisted.

Again, by the middle of the seventeenth century in England, the highly decorated forms of expression that had naturally sprung from the exuberant imaginative vitality of the Elizabethans had grown stereotyped and had hardened into mannerism; for the attaining of surprising effects, ingenuity and hard work had taken the place of spontaneity; and the grotesque and exaggerated prevailed instead of a splendid extravagance that had been defensible because natural. An age of greater calm and reason found these belated mannerisms offensive and unnatural, and claimed for

the rising neo-classicism that it was a return to nature. And so it was; for to the rationalism of the eighteenth century, restraint was natural.

But this restraint inevitably resulted in the unnatural curbing of tendencies which had never died out, though their expression was for a time obscured. By the end of the century, what was nature for Pope was its antithesis to Wordsworth, and the return to nature became once more the battle-cry of a new revolution. Thus the phrase may be regarded as little more than a synonym for reaction against a prevailing despotism that denies free play to individual impulses. So it has come about that some critics, bewildered by the multiplicity of so-called romantic phenomena, have been fain to fall back on this reaction as the only common element uniting all phases of the tendency. But our historical digression shows that this, too, is inadequate; since, in a larger view, such a reaction is as discernible in the dawn of classical as of romantic movements.

In the use of the phrase in the time of Wordsworth, we have to observe two main applications: one to human nature; the other to external nature. In the former use, the

phrase indicated a general protest against the conventions of the age. An exhaustive enumeration of these is unnecessary, but one or two may be recalled.

The excesses of the Puritan Revolution in the middle of the seventeenth century had resulted in a reaction against fanaticism, enthusiasm, and the public display of private emotion. After the vexatious restrictions imposed by Puritan intolerance, the plain man in England longed to be let alone, and was willing to let others alone, in religion and other matters of private concern. The prevailing theology became latitudinarian, and religious discussion became more argumentative, less an appeal to the emotions. Cynicism became a fashionable pose; enthusiasm was bad form. Private conduct found its sanctions less in individual conviction, more in the general agreement of social common sense. Literature busied itself with general types, treated externally; less with personal revelations. Artistic energy was devoted to the achievement of technical excellence, and the polishing of a few set forms suited to the expression of clearly thought but mildly felt intellectual views. Satire, with its exposure of the objective fact and its delight in incongruity

revealed by rational consideration, became the prevailing form. Ridicule, whether in the personal polemics of Dryden and Pope, in the fierce invective of Swift, or in the mild irony of Addison, was the weapon most employed and most feared. Everything tended to make the individual withdraw into his shell.

Every one is familiar with the typical scene of the period, drawn by its master hand:

> Close by those meads, for ever crown'd with flow'rs,
> Where Thames with pride surveys his rising tow'rs,
> There stands a structure of majestic frame,
> Which from the neighb'ring Hampton takes its name.
> Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom
> Of foreign Tyrants and of Nymphs at home ;
> Here thou, great Anna ! whom three realms obey,
> Dost sometimes counsel take — and sometimes tea.
>
> Hither the heroes and the nymphs resort,
> To taste awhile the pleasures of a Court ;
> In various talk th' instructive hours they past,
> Who gave the ball, or paid the visit last ;
> One speaks the glory of the British queen,
> And one describes a charming Indian screen ;
> A third interprets motions, looks, and eyes;
> At ev'ry word a reputation dies.
> Snuff, or the fan, supply each pause of chat,
> With singing, laughing, ogling, *and all that.*
>
> (*The Rape of the Lock*, III, 1–18.)

Of course, there is human nature here, and in abundance. It requires no very penetrating insight to see that beneath the surface the men

and women of Pope's satire are of like passions as we are, and that the emotions implied in the "singing, laughing, ogling, and all that" are fundamentally the same emotions that burst into lurid flame in *The Duchess of Malfi*, or into the poignant cry of "Ae fond kiss, and then we sever." Then, as now,

> The Colonel's lady an' Judy O'Grady
> Are sisters under their skins.

But it did not suit the taste of the time to realize these uncomfortable relationships. It dealt with human nature; but it was human nature at a tea-party, wearing party manners, and more concerned with etiquette than with sincerity. And because the expression was restricted, the emotion was restricted also.

In among the guests of this very proper tea-party stalked the astounding apparition of Jean Jacques Rousseau. Unconventionality was no word for him. His unbuttoned carelessness of propriety made an indecent exposure of both body and soul. His topics and his method of treatment were equally impossible. He wandered through the house of life, opening all the cupboards and pulling forth the skeletons that his century had been fain to suppose were securely locked up. Even his sentimentalism,

the tendency which more than any other he shared with his time, he carried to most reprehensible lengths. That he thus exposed the essential nature of sentimentalism made his conduct none the more pleasing to those who wished to play with it and preferred to think it innocuous.

Neither Rousseau nor the return to nature of which he may be taken as the leading exponent can fairly be treated as synonymous with Romanticism. Like the state of affairs against which it reacted, this return to nature was manifold, complex, not altogether consistent; and while it contained important romantic elements, it contained also divergences from the existing modes in directions quite other than romantic. The view of Romanticism as reaction, to which I have made allusion, has this among its unfortunate consequences, that it lumps together as romantic all characteristics which in any way stand in contrast with the prevailing spirit of the eighteenth century.

If we proceed to examine this return to human nature more closely, we perceive first that a chief element in it is that very subjectivity, introspection, and self-consciousness, which has already been discussed. The vindication of the

right to be interested in one's own internal processes, of the right to express this interest in verse lyric or prose confession, we have seen to be vitally related to the activity of the imagination, and thus to be entitled to be regarded as a phase of Romanticism. The assertion of the rights of emotion is a more complicated matter. The mere fact that the expression of emotion was restrained by the spirit of the eighteenth century does not, as has been noted, justify us in regarding the removal of that restraint as necessarily a mark of Romanticism. Emotion stimulates imagination and is stimulated by it in turn, and in so far as the free expression of natural human feeling in a poem is due to imaginative causes, it is to be reckoned as a romantic characteristic. But emotion may be roused by many things besides imagination, and the barriers to its expression may be removed by other forces. Thus in a period like that of the French Revolution, the general sense of the breaking of bonds which the collapse of so large a part of the traditional structure of society involved, gave free rein to some kinds of emotion which had their source in faculties far removed from the imagination. The emotional fury which

prompted many of the horrors of the Reign of Terror, the attraction which drew the crowds to gloat upon the sight of the guillotine harvesting its daily crop, may have had in some cases an original ideal element in it; but, for the most part, it belonged to a much lower range of human experience.

On the other hand, there were emotions particularly prevalent at this period, in which the imaginative and romantic elements are easily discernible. The democratic attitude, when not merely a theoretic belief founded solely on reason, when held passionately as it was often held then, and is sometimes still, was oftener than not due to some ideal vision of humanity. Coleridge and Wordsworth, for example, were both in their younger manhood enthusiastic sympathizers with the vindication of the rights of man, and in both cases their sympathy was evoked by imaginative pictures. Coleridge was roused by a generous indignation which sprang from images of hardship and injustice which thronged his mind.

> O ye numberless,
> Whom foul Oppression's ruffian gluttony
> Drives from life's plenteous feast ! O thou poor wretch
> Who, nursed in darkness and made wild by want,
> Roamest for prey, yea, thy unnatural hand
> Dost lift to deeds of blood !

. . . Rest awhile,
Children of wretchedness ! The hour is nigh
And lo ! the Great, the Rich, the Mighty Men,
The Kings and the Chief Captains of the World,
With all that, fixed on high like stars of Heaven,
Shot baleful influence, shall be cast to earth,
Vile and down-trodden, as the untimely fruit
Shook from the fig-tree by a sudden storm.

The literary critic regards this as impassioned political verse, enriched with a series of vivid imaginative pictures. The contemporary upholder of the old order would have dismissed it as romantic exaggeration. Both judgments recognize that the root of the passionate sympathy which it expresses lay in the imagination, and that therein consists the reason for calling it romantic verse.

Wordsworth's face, during the period of his sympathy with the Revolution, was turned to the future with its promise rather than to the past with its wrongs. One has only to recall the famous outburst that has become the accepted expression of the mood of the noblest spirits of that time:

Oh ! pleasant exercise of hope and joy !
For mighty were the auxiliars which then stood
Upon our side, we who were strong in love !
Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven ! — Oh ! times,
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways

> Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
> The attraction of a country in romance !

It is, however, important to remember that not all the literature of "Liberty, Fraternity, Equality," even when impassioned, is to be called romantic. This becomes clear if we consider still another democratic utterance of the period, one that has reached the masses of the people, at least in the poet's own country, as those more literary expressions of Wordsworth and Coleridge never could,— Burns's *A Man's a Man for a' that*. Coleridge's lines were, we saw, a series of imaginatively wrought pictures, rousing indignation and pity; Wordsworth's were a rendering of a state of emotional exaltation caused by an imaginative vision of the possibilities of making the world over on ideal lines: where is the imaginative element in these verses of Burns? The warp is fact, the woof is reason; what little imagination enters is in the suggestive value of the concrete terms employed — hodden-gray, silks, wine, riband, star, and the like — and in the somewhat vague general prophecy of the coming of universal brotherhood. But the imagination is subordinate. It is a splendid piece of political rhetoric, sincerely felt and vigorously

expressed, but in it there is no romance. The democracy of an aristocrat or an artist is likely to be romantic: the democracy of a peasant is only common sense.

Closely allied to the democracy of the Revolution, yet exhibited in a totally different group of poems, is the new sense of the worthiness of humble life as the theme of poetry. The poetry of the common people, especially as represented in the work of Crabbe, Burns, and Wordsworth, is habitually classed as belonging to the Romantic Movement; mainly, it would seem, because the subjects of the poetry of the preceding age were chiefly from the world of polite society. But we have already seen several times that this negative reason is insufficient. Nothing much less romantic than the poetry of Crabbe could well be found in verse; the positive quality of his work, and of the pictures of peasant life by Burns, will be treated in a subsequent chapter. Wordsworth's poems of humble life, however, present a more complex problem, and demand some examination while we are still dealing with the predominance of imagination. He himself states in his famous Preface that his object was "to choose incidents and situations from common

life, . . . and to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature." [1] Coleridge gives corroboration. "Mr. Wordsworth," he says, "was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand." [2]

It appears from these two statements that Wordsworth's main aim was not that truth to fact which characterizes the Realist; nor was it to give support to a democratic view of society. It was the legitimate purpose of the im-

[1] Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800.
[2] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1817, chap. XIV.

aginative artist; and this purpose is admirably expressed in the phrases employed: the viewing of phenomena in the light of imagination, and tracing in them the primary laws of human nature; breaking the film of familiarity, and displaying the loveliness and wonder of the world. With such a program, the surprise is not that the poems of humble life are to such an extent imaginative and romantic, but that they are not more consistently so.

That this program was in part carried out, and that some of these poems of humble life possess so great an imaginative element as to be justly called romantic, must be conceded. Such a one is *The Reverie of Poor Susan*, the romantic quality of which appears the moment we think of Crabbe's method of treating such a subject. But the supreme instance is the masterpiece of *The Solitary Reaper*, which can never be too often quoted:

> Behold her, single in the field,
> Yon solitary Highland Lass!
> Reaping and singing by herself;
> Stop here, or gently pass!
> Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
> And sings a melancholy strain;
> O listen! for the Vale profound
> Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings? —
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending; —
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

Here is the simplest and most commonplace of rustic scenes taken up with an intensity of imagination that transfigures it. With an unparalleled felicity of expression, and an extraordinary fertility of suggestion, Wordsworth conveys to his reader a fragment of experience rendered with such fineness and poignancy as

to lodge it permanently in the recesses of the spirit. In this poem Wordsworth shows in practice, what he had suggested in the theoretical statements of his Preface, that in the scenes and events of humble life imagination may find a peculiar opportunity; because in them it may reach, with a directness impossible in the treatment of sophisticated themes, those simple elemental motives and ideas to bring us into vivid relation with which is, as we have seen, the loftiest achievement of that faculty.

But it cannot be contended that always, or even usually, Wordsworth's treatment of such incidents had a result approaching this. Many of them hardly succeed from any point of view; others, such, for example, as *Michael*, while of great beauty, are not predominatingly imaginative, and cannot properly be classed as romantic.[1] On the whole, it must be concluded that the importance of the extending of the field of poetry to include a larger proportion of humble and rustic themes has, if regarded as a phase of Romanticism, been greatly exaggerated.

To a much greater extent is the return to

[1] Compare, on this point, pp. 151–154, below.

nature which is implied in Rousseau's admiring picture of a supposed Golden Age, the worship of the ideal savage, the primitive man living in unconscious harmony with the universe, to be regarded as essentially romantic. Though persisting through the next generation in the poetry of Byron, and discernible still later in the idealizing of the noble red man of the forests and prairies of North America, it was attacked and exposed not only by the satirists of the *Anti-Jacobin*, but by such radicals as Mary Wollstonecraft and her husband, William Godwin. An imaginative element it certainly had; and this vision of primitive savage society was romantic in the sense that it was unreal. But its actual quality can be perceived in such an attempt to realize it as one finds in Byron, and in him best, perhaps, in *The Island*. In this poem both human and external nature among tropical savages are held up as exhibiting a condition far superior to civilization. Here is the ideal human nature:

> There sat the gentle savage of the wild,
> In growth a woman, though in years a child,
> As childhood dates within our colder clime,
> Where nought is ripen'd rapidly save crime;
> The infant of an infant world, as pure
> From nature — lovely, warm, and premature;

Dusky like night, but night with all her stars,
Or cavern sparkling with its native spars;
With eyes that were a language and a spell,
A form like Aphrodite's in her shell,
With all her loves around her on the deep,
Voluptuous as the first approach of sleep;
Yet full of life — for through her tropic cheek
The blush would make its way, and all but speak:
The sun-born blood suffused her neck, and threw
O'er her clear nut-brown skin a lucid hue,
Like coral reddening through the darken'd wave,
Which draws the diver to the crimson cave.
Such was this daughter of the southern seas. . . .

(Canto II, st. vii.)

The physical surroundings of this goddess of the southern seas are entirely appropriate:

The cava feast, the yam, the cocoa's root,
Which bears at once the cup, and milk, and fruit;
The bread-tree, which, without the ploughshare, yields
The unreap'd harvest of unfurrow'd fields,
And bakes its unadulterated loaves
Without a furnace in unpurchased groves,
And flings off famine from its fertile breast,
A priceless market for the gathering guest.

(Canto II, st. xi.)

It is to be admitted at once that the vision of life here held up has in it a suspiciously large material element. But no one is likely to refuse it the name romantic, or to deny that it is a conception formed chiefly by the imagination, even though its imagination is used to throw a halo round sheer voluptuousness. The

vividness of sensuous suggestion is nothing against its romantic quality: the limitations which prevent its reaching the level of great literature are to be found in its disregard of so many of the facts of human nature, and in its paucity of reflection. For it is clear that a little rational consideration would have shown Byron that an environment so barren of the higher intellectual and spiritual stimuli would have bored him in a week. One cannot imagine this spoiled child of civilization, this connoisseur in sophisticated pleasure, finding any prolonged satisfaction in an existence whose content is typified by the picture of a naïve pair, as free from subtlety as from clothing, strolling by a tepid beach under a tropical sunset, eating unsyndicated bananas. As literature it is second-rate, because it is unconvincing; and it is unconvincing because it is not thought out, and because the materials with which his imagination is dealing are so meagre, appeal to such a low range of emotions, and do nothing to raise it to a point from which large views are possible. Yet the poem is, of its kind, undoubtedly imaginative, as is the whole conception of primitive society which Byron derived from Rousseau. The social theory based

upon this conception was long ago demolished, nor are we here concerned with its historical or rational validity. It is only important for us to recognize it as a prominent element in the intellectual life of the time, and to see that it is by virtue of the predominating element of imagination in it that it became a notable factor in the Romantic revival.

IV

The sense of the phrase, the "Return to Nature," which comes to our mind when we use it in connection with the Romantic Movement in England, is less any of the interpretations so far discussed, than the increased prominence in the poetry of the time of scenery, in the largest use of the word. External nature, especially remote and untouched by the hand of man, undoubtedly begins to play a much larger part in the verse of the end of the eighteenth century than it had perhaps ever done before; and again this phenomenon, appearing about the same time as others which have been indiscriminately grouped together as romantic, has been labelled with the same name. But if the word is to mean anything specific, a more discerning examination of the manifestations

of this tendency also is necessary. The landscapes of Thomson and Cowper and Crabbe, the moralizings over the daisy by Burns, the pictures of the Lake Country by Wordsworth as well as his minuter studies of flowers, the "inventories of Nature's beauties" which that poet so deprecated in Scott, the eloquent delineation of lake and mountain and ocean by Byron, the opalescent creations of light and cloud which glorify the poetry of Shelley, the intimate delight afforded by natural sights and sounds to the senses of Keats, — all these have been taken as equally exemplifying romantic tendencies. Yet there is little common to them all; and nothing, if we take them without discrimination, which unites all of them with such phases of Romanticism as Medievalism and Subjectivity.

It is clear, at the outset, that the degree of imagination involved in these different methods of treating natural scenery is very variable. All of them depart from the conventional landscape of the school of Pope, some in choice of subject, some in manner of treatment, most, perhaps, in both. But we are now on our guard against assuming that everything showing a reaction against neo-classicism must be romantic;

and nowhere can we find a clearer instance of this than in this matter of the treatment of external nature. For the elaborate descriptions of Scottish scenery in Thomson's *Seasons*, the pictures of the midlands of England in Cowper's *Task*, or of the wastes of the Eastern counties in Crabbe's *Village*, are obviously notable, not for their imaginativeness, but for their literal truth. The discussion of them in detail, then, belongs to the chapter that deals with Realism and the Sense of Fact. At present we are seeking for evidences of the predominance of the imagination.

A suggestion that may be of service in this search is to be found if we consider types of scenery, for some kinds of landscape are much more apt than others to stimulate the imaginative faculty. The vaster and more awe-inspiring objects in the natural world, mountains, great deserts, the ocean, the clouds, have this effect, and have it more powerfully at special times: in storm rather than in calm; at night rather than in the plain light of day. The more remote and inaccessible these appear, the wilder and more rugged, the farther from the familiar, the more likely are they to rouse the sense of wonder and mystery, and to impel

the mind to regions of imaginative speculation far removed from the explicable facts of daily experience. As we have already noted in our discussion of the manifestations of the imagination, it is especially in the presence of these awful and sublime aspects of nature that the imagination most readily rouses us to those ecstatic experiences in which the soul rises above the particular and transitory, into the sphere of the universal and eternal.

This sense of wonder has long been recognized as an important element in romantic art, and has been so much emphasized by one noted critic that he has defined the Romantic Movement as a whole as "the Renascence of Wonder." Wonder as a source of imaginative activity might have been noted also in our discussion of the romantic element in the medieval revival. Mr. Watts-Dunton's phrase is, indeed, admirable as far as it goes: the objection to it being simply that it does not go far enough; that, wonder being only one aspect of imaginative activity, the definition is not comprehensive enough, and fails to include other aspects which are equally productive of romantic effects. A similar criticism must be made of Pater's suggestive phrase for Romanticism,—

"the addition of strangeness to beauty"; for strangeness is only the cause of which wonder is the effect, and the view of imaginative activity implied in it is subject to the same limitations.

Landscapes inspiring emotions of wonder, strangeness, terror, awe, and the like, are common in nearly all of the poets regarded as distinctively romantic. We have noted an example already in the wildly imagined Orientalism of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan;* and others occur to us at once from the haunted woodlands of *Christabel*, or the frightful tropic ocean of *The Ancient Mariner*. The fame of Byron owes much to those eloquent apostrophes to the awe-inspiring aspects of nature, which, hackneyed though they be, can still stir the pulse:

> The stars are forth, the moon above the tops
> Of the snow-shining mountains. — Beautiful!
> I linger yet with Nature, for the Night
> Hath been to me a more familiar face
> Than that of man; and in her starry shade
> Of dim and solitary loveliness,
> I learn'd the language of another world.
>
> (*Manfred*, III, iv, 1.)

Less delicate in its imaginative suggestion than the work of Coleridge, less lofty in its spiritual appeal than that of Wordsworth,

hampered by a tendency to the use of the sensational, Byron's landscape has yet genuine imaginative elements which teach "the language of another world." More ethereal by far, and all but lifted at times by the very violence of imagination out of all kinship to the world of everyday experience, the landscapes of Shelley are, in our present sense, the most romantic of all:

> Mont Blanc yet gleams on high : — the power is there,
> The still and solemn power of many sights,
> And many sounds, and much of life and death.
> In the calm darkness of the moonless nights,
> In the lone glare of day, the snows descend
> Upon that Mountain ; none beholds them there,
> Nor when the flakes burn in the sinking sun,
> Or the star-beams dart through them : — Winds contend
> Silently there, and heap the snow with breath
> Rapid and strong, but silently ! Its home
> The voiceless lightning in these solitudes
> Keeps innocently, and like vapor broods
> Over the snow. The secret Strength of things
> Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
> Of Heaven is as a law, inhabits thee !
> And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
> If to the human mind's imaginings
> Silence and solitude were vacancy ?
>
> (*Mont Blanc*, st. v.)

But it is hardly necessary to argue or to illustrate further the presence of a dominating imagination in these renderings of the strange

and terrible and remote aspects of nature. No other feature of the poetry of this period is so generally recognized as romantic; and the application of our theory at this point is not likely to be disputed. It should be noted, however, that, though the treatment of wild landscape by all these poets may be thus grouped together by virtue of a powerful imaginative element in all, this element manifests itself in a great variety of ways. Such descriptions in Scott, and often in Coleridge, are impersonal; and so far as they are given human relations, these are connected with persons in a tale. The terror of the equatorial seas in *The Ancient Mariner* is represented in its effect, not on the poet, but on the mariner; the mysterious shades of the Trosachs are connected by Scott, not with his own feelings, but with the apprehensions of his lost hero. In Byron, on the other hand, such aspects of nature are constantly introduced as the objects of contemplation of a soul alienated and harassed by unsympathetic contact with society; and this soul is usually Byron's own. At other times they gain interest for him from their association with great men of the past, and the mention of such names broaches other streams of

suggestion. To Shelley, as the passage just quoted illustrates, the grander features of the natural world are fraught with a large metaphysical significance, in the tracing of which he is apt to lose sight of the perceived facts altogether. Wordsworth, with a firmer grasp on external reality, is hardly, if at all, less stimulated to an imaginative philosophizing by nature's solitudes, and he never tires of describing the action and reaction between nature and spirit.

The mention of Wordsworth reminds us that the imaginative or romantic treatment of nature is not confined to the larger and more awe-inspiring aspects, but appears also in the study of detail. An illustration may be found in the lines of Wordsworth to a daisy, quoted in a previous chapter; and it is abundantly exemplified in the descriptive poetry of Keats. The realistic side of this part of Keats's work will be discussed later; for the moment we may look for the imaginative element in it. Take one or two characteristic passages:

> I stood tip-toe upon a little hill,
> The air was cooling, and so very still,
> That the sweet buds which with a modest pride
> Pull droopingly, in slanting curve aside,

Their scantly leav'd, and finely tapering stems,
Had not yet lost those starry diadems
Caught from the early sobbing of the morn:
. . . . . .

Here are sweet peas, on tip-toe for a flight:
With wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white,
And taper fingers catching at all things,
To bind them all about with tiny rings.

(*Poems*, 1817, p. 1.)

Or a somewhat similar passage from Coleridge:

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
Whether the summer clothe the general earth
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
Of mossy apple tree, while the nigh thatch
Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
Heard only in the trances of the blast,
Or if the secret ministry of frost
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

(*Frost at Midnight*, 65–74.)

It is true that part of the pleasure derived from these passages is due to the exquisite precision with which fair natural objects are delineated; but in all there is a persistent tendency to depart from sheer literalism, and to intensify the interest in the sensuous by suggestions of the supersensuous, or by charming and unexpected comparisons with other sensuous images. The poet's imagination, though

dealing with real objects, is ever "on tip-toe for a flight." This appears not only in the palpable personification of such a line as

> Caught from the early sobbing of the morn,

but also in the description of the icicles,

> Quietly shining to the quiet Moon,

which, though, taken word by word, it seems to be perfectly literal, yet, taken as a line, touches us imaginatively in a fashion too subtle for analysis. These are lines exemplifying that gift allowed to man,

> That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.

In this miracle of the imaginative transformation of detailed description, then, as well as in the treatment of the vast and terrible, we may recognize the essential quality of the romantic.

Such are the main senses in which the phrase, the "Return to Nature" may be taken, when it is treated as an aspect of Romanticism. In this connection, as we have seen, it has been applied to the reappearance of a more spontaneous expression of personal feeling, to the Revolutionary doctrine of the rights of man, to the renewal of interest in humble and unso-

phisticated rustic life, to the aspiration towards the supposed ideal simplicity of the primitive savage, and to the great enlargement of natural description in poetry. In each of these cases we have seen that the name romantic cannot be applied mechanically, but only when, on discriminating examination, we find that there is to be found in the new phase a predominance of imagination.

The three phrases which we selected as representing the more familiar attempts to define Romanticism have now been discussed. In each of them we have found an element of truth: in none of them a sufficient breadth of application. Each of them, moreover, has been shown to include elements to which we have not been able to grant a place in any coherent and unified view of the essential nature of the tendency under discussion. On the other hand, it has, I believe, been possible to insist upon the applicability of our conception, the predominance of imagination over reason and the sense of fact, without expelling from the body of romantic poetry anything which the discerning critic is likely to view as essential to a complete account of its forms.

There are, of course, many other definitions which might have been used to test the present theory, as there are many characteristics of so-called romantic facts which it has not been possible to discuss. Especially inadequate, it may seem, has been the application of our formula to the facts of the romantic period in France and Germany. In those countries the romantic movement was much more conscious than in England, more a matter of schools, of propaganda, of a faith to be preached and practised for the regeneration of the world of art. The result of this has been that historians of the period, treating a group of men confessedly belonging to the movement, have been tempted to include in their view of the essential spirit of Romanticism all the characteristics of all the members. Such an extreme inclusiveness was bound to produce a highly complex, if not a confused, impression of the dominant tendency. By drawing illustrations in the main from the less coherent English group, and by abstaining from a rigidly historical treatment, I have attempted to find for the term romantic a content which will explain and illuminate its application in any period and to any art. It is clear that even partial success in this attempt

would entail the running counter, in the case of almost every reader, to some cherished conceptions and uses of the word in question, — an offence which is to be regretted but, under the circumstances, is hardly to be avoided.

CHAPTER IV

REASON AND CLASSICISM

I

"THE age of prose and reason," Matthew Arnold's phrase for what with characteristic condescension he called "our excellent and indispensable eighteenth century," has passed into the common currency of the literary histories. One effect of its familiarity has been to confirm the general association of reason with prose, so that, at the outset of a discussion on reason as an element of poetry, we find it incumbent on us to expound the meaning of the term so as to make clear its title to appear in the present connection.

Reason, then, as a factor in pure literature, means both more and less than it implies when used in technical philosophy. It means less, because it does not include formal syllogistic argument. Not that there may not underlie the course of thought, even in a romantic lyric, a perfectly logical structure; but the logical formula is not (in general) explicitly stated in poetry, nor — what is more important —

does the convincing power of the poem depend upon its appeal to the logical faculty in the reader.

But if, on the one hand, we are to speak of reason as an element in poetry without implying formal logic, we must, on the other, extend it far beyond the logician's use. It includes the power of calculating proportions, of perceiving the relevant and the fit, of preserving harmony, of adapting means to ends, of ordering and arranging and selecting detail, especially with a view to emphasizing the type. In all of these processes we are employing the rational judgment, and both in the processes and their results it is easy to distinguish them from the imaginative powers on the one side and those faculties which we are to group under the sense of fact on the other. In this large sense, then, we are to use the word reason.

The results of these rational processes just enumerated may be fairly summed up in the word "form"; and, as soon as form is mentioned, one realizes how absolute is its claim to a place among the essential elements of poetry. Just as romantic critics, concentrating attention upon the function of the imagination, and finding in it the vital characteristic of

poetry, are apt to ignore all else; so critics of an opposite temperament, believing formless beauty to be a contradiction in terms, emphasize this element at the expense of content, and fall into an equally vicious extreme. However it may be with painting and sculpture, there is no question that cries like "Art for Art's sake," when applied to literature, indicate merely the loss of that balance which is as important in the criticism as it is in the creation of poetry.

II

The predominance of the rational and formal element in art results, as has been pointed out, in the tendency known as Classicism. Classicism, however, is unfortunately employed in almost as many senses as Romanticism; and before we can proceed with our illustration of that use of it which we have in mind when we call it the outcome of the predominance of reason, it is necessary to take account of the more important of these senses, and to see whether there is any common element running through all.

Classical, says Arnold, means belonging to the class of the very best. This use, with others

closely allied to it, is indeed very familiar. When one reads that Dickens, ten years before his death, had already become a classic, one understands the statement to mean that he had taken his place among those authors whose permanent value is no longer in question, and a knowledge of whose work is taken for granted among cultivated people. If one limits the praise by calling him an English classic, one assumes a knowledge of his books only among English-speaking people; if one calls him a world classic, one assumes it in cultivated people over all the globe. But in making this statement, the critic certainly did not mean, and no one would interpret him as meaning, that Dickens's main characteristic was the predominance of the rational element, or a superlative care for form; for wherever Dickens's chief excellence lies, it is not in these things. A man may be classical in this sense for any one of many reasons: this use of the term is an indication merely of rank and vogue, and does nothing to define the specific qualities on which such rank and vogue depend, and of which we are in search. This meaning, then, we set aside, as it in no way enters into our discussion.

Again, classical is used to describe the art of Greek and Roman antiquity, sometimes as a whole, sometimes with reference to those qualities by virtue of which it contrasts most clearly with medieval or modern art. In the larger application, it again can be of little service to us, and it would be a gain for clear thinking in general if we could substitute "antique," "Greek antiquity," and "Roman antiquity" for such terms as "classical" and "the classics" when they are used in a broadly temporal and geographical sense. For, on grounds already stated, we are not to expect the art of two very different peoples, produced over a period of a thousand years, to exhibit persistently the preponderance of any one of a group of elements all of which are fundamental in human nature. The facts, too, bear out this expectation. One finds in abundance in the art of Greece and Rome products in which the element of imagination is not only prominent but prevailing. The *Odyssey*, as contrasted with the *Iliad*, and still more with the *Æneid*, is distinctly a romantic tale, suffused with an atmosphere of wonder, with the rational and the realistic elements throughout subordinate to the imaginative. One has only

to recall for a moment the nature of the adventures of Ulysses, to call up the images of Circe and Calypso, of Polyphemus and the Cyclops, of Nausicaa, of Scylla and Charybdis, of the great scene of the slaying of the suitors at the close, to realize that the poem is as truly a romance of adventure as *Gawain and the Green Knight*, or *Treasure Island*. Again, Euripides,

> Our Euripides, the human,
> With his droppings of warm tears,
> And his touches of things common
> Till they rose to touch the spheres,

with his interest in the individual and his inner life, with his humanization of the Gods, with the permeation of his own personality through his whole treatment of Greek legend, is admittedly, in contrast with Sophocles, for instance, romantic and sentimental, sometimes even realistic. Plato, in spite of the parade of logical processes in his dialogues, both as a critic in his theory of inspiration, and as a constructive philosopher in his idealism is clearly of an imaginative rather than of a purely rational type, as appears the moment one contrasts him with Aristotle. The satirists, on the other hand, have a strong realistic strain.

Further examples could be cited; but these are enough to bring before us clearly the impossibility of assuming in all the artists of Greek and Roman antiquity even an approximately uniform proportioning of our fundamental elements, and the impossibility of gaining from their work in the mass any substantial help towards a clear conception of "classical," as the mark of a tendency as distinct from a period.

III

But if we turn to the second alternative, and give our attention to the qualities which we have in mind when we contrast the antique with the medieval or the modern, we are more likely to be rewarded. This contrast appears perhaps most distinctly, not in literature, but in the arts of sculpture and architecture. When we think of the difference between the Parthenon and the Cathedral of Chartres, we are at once aware of clearly opposed tendencies. In the one we find exquisite proportion and clearly marked symmetry, a strict avoidance of everything unnecessary and irrelevant, resulting in a chaste simplicity, a fine adjustment of means to ends, a marked unity of

conception due largely to a parsimony of detail. In the other, proportion and symmetry are less satisfying; much that is irrelevant, from a rational point of view, is piled on in the effort to obtain richness rather than simplicity; and unity is not so much realized as suggested by a multitude of details, that, in their combined effect, do succeed in rousing a powerful if often vague emotion. The one satisfies through a sense of perfect achievement; the other inspires through a sense of infinite striving. The one expresses a temperament fundamentally rational, refusing to attempt the impossible, setting before it a clearly defined aim, and, by virtue of an admirable power of fitting means to ends, achieving that aim. The other expresses a temperament fundamentally imaginative, enamoured of mystery, ever striving to grasp the infinite, and, by virtue of the intensity of its vision, drawing others to share its aspiration, but failing of perfect expression. The one satisfies with a sense of repose; the other stirs an insatiable yearning. The one is classical; the other romantic.

This conception of classicism can be still farther defined by contrast with realism. Com-

pare, for example, two descriptions of persons, each fairly representative of its kind. In the first book of the *Æneid,* Virgil introduces Dido in the following terms:

> While on such spectacle Æneas' eyes
> Looked wondering, while mute and motionless
> He stood at gaze, Queen Dido to the shrine
> In lovely majesty drew near ; a throng
> Of youthful followers pressed round her way.
> So by the margin of Eurotas wide
> Or o'er the Cynthian steep, Diana leads
> Her bright processional ; hither and yon
> Are visionary legions numberless
> Of Oreads ; the regnant goddess bears
> A quiver on her shoulders, and is seen
> Emerging tallest of her beauteous train ;
> While joy unutterable thrills the breast
> Of fond Latona : Dido not less fair
> Amid her subjects passed, and not less bright
> Her glow of gracious joy, while she approved
> Her future kingdom's pomp and vast emprise.
> Then at the sacred portal and beneath
> The temple's vaulted dome she took her place,
> Encompassed by armed men, and lifted high
> Upon a throne ; her statutes and decrees
> The people heard, and took what lot or toil
> Her sentence, or impartial urn, assigned.[1]

The classical quality of this description appears both in the aim and in the method. The poet is seeking to present, not a portrait, but a type; to convey a general, not a particular,

[1] *Æneid,* I, 494–519 ; trans. Williams.

impression of beauty and majesty, and so is concerned with large outlines, definite enough to place the figure in its class, rather than with specific details which might serve to identify an individual. The method by which this is accomplished is seen in the use of general terms, "forma pulcherrima," "supereminet," "laeta" (made, unfortunately, more specific and elaborate in the translation), by the singleness of the action described, a stately processional approach, then the administration of justice, as the queen sits enthroned with an appropriately imposing architectural background; and, finally, by the method of the epic simile. Here direct description is abandoned, and the main impression is produced, not by terms that draw on first-hand sensuous experience, but by allusion to another typical figure, by the resort to a traditional image in which the main conceptions of beauty and majesty are conventionally embodied in the moon goddess, and which had already been used by Homer for a similar purpose.

Consider, now, a personal description by Chaucer:

> A good wif was ther of biside Bathe,
> But she was som-del deef, and that was scathe.

Of clooth makyng she haddė swich an haunt
She passėd hem of Ypres and of Gaunt.
In al the parisshe wif nė was ther noon
That to th' offrynge bifore hire sholdė goon:
And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she,
That she was out of allė charitee.
Hir coverchiefs ful fynė weren of ground, —
I dorstė swere they weyėden ten pound, —
That on a Sonday weren upon her heed.
Her hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,
Ful streite y-teyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe;
Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.
She was a worthy womman al her lyvė;
Housbondes at chirchė dore she haddė fyvė
Withouten oother compaignye in youthe
(But ther of nedeth not to speke as nowthe).
And thries hadde she been at Ierusalem;
She haddė passed many a straungė strem:
At Romė she hadde been, and at Boloigne,
In Galice at Seint Iame and at Coloigne.
She koudė muchel of wandrynge by the weye,
Gat-tothed was she, soothly for to seye.
Upon an amblere esily she sat,
Y-wympled wel, and on her heed an hat
As brood as is a bokeler or a targe;
A foot mantel about hir hipes large,
And on hire feet a paire of spores sharpe.
In felaweship wel koude she laughe and carpe;
Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce,
For she koude of that art the oldė daunce.[1]

Here both aim and method are clearly in contrast with those we have observed in Virgil. We have now to deal with a portrait, not with-

[1] *Canterbury Tales, Prologue*, vv. 445–476.

out typical qualities, to be sure, but first of all of an individual, whom one is bound to believe the poet had actually seen, whose appearance he had minutely observed and vividly remembered. Since, then, he is not seeking to place her in a class, the method of allusion by the simile is not employed: there is no gaining of a general idea by a traditional comparison; and in place of vague and general terms, everything is specific and capable of identification. The sense of fact, of what has been actually observed, dominates the piece, while in the contrasted passage from Virgil the result we have noted is the effect of a reasoned selection, the comparatively few details being chosen because they combine well into a picture which harmonizes with the epic whole of which it forms a part. A crowd of homely familiar details, such as give Chaucer's realistic portrait its peculiar actuality, would be hopelessly out of place in the classical narrative. It would be like a flannel patch on a silk gown. Actuality of Chaucer's kind was not Virgil's aim, but rather a formal beauty for which the law had already been given by tradition, and which could be achieved only by a conscious restraint, by severe selection, by the use of a trained judg-

ment in matters of harmony and proportion — in short, by the domination of reason.

So numerous and so exquisite are the instances of this kind of beauty in the literature of Greece and Rome, that, though the art of these countries exhibits a great variety of phases and tendencies, and is at times romantic or realistic as well as classic, it is still the most obvious source to which we turn when we want examples of the classic in the sense in which we are seeking to define it. We must recognize that it is by no mere accident that classic is so often used to describe antique art as a whole, however much we regret the loss of discrimination which this equation implies.

IV

There is still a third connection in which the term Classical is used. All the greater European literatures, to say nothing of some of the Asiatic, contain sections which are described in the text-books as the Classical Period. In so far as this is used to imply merely that in such a period the national literature reached its highest point, the phrase has no immediate interest for us; and this application of the

word must be set aside with that already disposed of, by which any undisputed masterpiece is termed a classic. But in France, for example, the age of Corneille, Racine, and Molière is known as the classical period, not only because of the excellence of the literature then produced, but because of the nature of that excellence; and the name is employed even by those who are hostile to its whole spirit and who depreciate its achievement. So in England we have a classical age and a classical school of poetry, which is not the age of the greatest masters, and the poetry of which has even been charged with lacking altogether the essential spirit of poetry. What, then, do we mean when we call Pope the head of the classical school in England? Is the reference to Greek and Roman antiquity? or is it to that essence of classicism which we found characteristic, indeed, of antiquity, but by no means always present there?

The answer to these questions is that it is partly both, but neither altogether. The period conventionally known as the Eighteenth Century in English Literature, the period, that is, extending from Waller and Dryden to the death of Dr. Johnson, had, in fact, quite dis-

cernible relations with antiquity, though these relations were perhaps hardly as close as the writers of that age supposed. Their criticism, for example, was based, as they believed, upon the precepts of Aristotle and Horace and on the practice of Homer and Virgil and of the Greek dramatists; and they made valiant efforts to carry their critical principles into operation. Underlying these efforts were certain assumptions that are of profound importance in testing the claims of this period to the name classical in any sense. It was assumed that from the criticism of Aristotle, and from the masterpieces of his contemporaries, rules could be deduced, which, if followed, would lead to the production of similar classical masterpieces. And the chief aid to the following of these rules was to be found in imitation, in the use, say, of Homer as a model for the epic poet, or of Sophocles for the dramatic poet. The traditionalism which we have noted as already apparent in the epic manner of Virgil is here carried to an extreme, and experience and the personal vision are alike ignored in the quest for the secret of the ancients. The nature of the rules they deduced is well known. The dramatic unities are the most notorious. An-

other is the law of decorum, which forbade any speech or action out of character, the character intended being not individual but typical. A typical gentleman, for example, fought only with men of his own rank, therefore it was laid down that no man in a tragedy could kill another, unless the laws of the duel permitted them to encounter. Othello is thus condemned for murdering Desdemona, not because his suspicions were unfounded, but because decorum forbade a man to kill a woman, since he was not allowed to meet her on the field of honor. Philosophy, says a typical critic of the time, tells us that it is a principle in the nature of man to be grateful. Ingratitude is therefore unnatural, and a poet must not depict the unnatural, however history and fact may present him with instances of it. Therefore an ungrateful character is a blot on a play.

This last instance shows us that, as we noted in the discussion of the romantic senses of "nature," the eighteenth century also claimed to follow nature. For this age, nature is what normally happens; and the rules of that day found a double sanction — in nature so defined, and in the practice of the ancients.

> Those Rules of old discovered, not devis'd,
> Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd;
> Nature, like liberty, is but restrain'd
> By the same laws which first herself ordain'd.[1]

Verisimilitude, a quality much insisted on at this time, and in origin a restricted interpretation of Aristotle's preference for the probable, was exalted into a tyrannical principle which again excluded the individual, in its fear of the abnormal or self-contradictory, and reduced the delineation of character to a simplicity which belied human nature. A king must be kingly, and nothing else; an official must be officious, and nothing else; a maid must be modest and nothing else; and so through the whole range of humanity; until in the perfection of decorum and verisimilitude, all interest evaporated, and a dead monotony reigned.

The mis-reading of Aristotle and of human life which this extreme implies is not more surprising than the delusion that the ancient poets exemplified these preposterous rules. Pope but versifies the view of the dominant contemporary school:

> You, then whose judgment the right course would steer,
> Know well each ancient's proper character;

[1] Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, ll. 88–91.

His fable, subject, scope in ev'ry page ;
Religion, country, genius of his age :
Without all these at once before your eyes,
Cavil you may, but never criticize.
Be Homer's works your study and delight,
Read them by day, and meditate by night;
Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims bring,
And trace the Muses upward to their spring.
Still with itself compar'd, his text peruse ;
And let your comment be the Mantuan Muse.
When first young Maro in his boundless mind
A work t' outlast immortal Rome design'd,
Perhaps he seem'd above the critic's law,
And but from Nature's fountains scorn'd to draw :
But when t' examine ev'ry part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.
Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold design ;
And rules as strict his labour'd work confine,
As if the Stagirite o'erlook'd each line.
Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem ;
To copy nature is to copy them.[1]

It is hardly necessary to go into details to show how far astray is such criticism: how impossible it is to identify the freshness of observation and spontaneity of utterance of Homer, or the sublime imaginations of Æschylus, with this conventionalized and methodized "nature" which Pope finds, or says he finds, in them. Nor are we to believe that Pope, in his most vital work, practises his own pre-

[1] *Essay on Criticism*, ll. 118–140.

cepts. But we have said enough to show the relation of eighteenth-century criticism to the literature of antiquity. Of course, the attitude was not constant or uniform. Historians of criticism find many subdivisions and stages of development, the school of rules, the school of common sense, the school of taste, and the like: but throughout runs the prevailing tendency to conceive art as the product of rules that can be deduced from the practice of antiquity and can be justified by reason. The gulf separating such criticism and creation founded upon it, from the essential and characteristic quality of the art of antiquity, more especially of Greece, has long been recognized, and is acknowledged in the application to the eighteenth century of the terms *neo-classic* and *pseudo-classic*, as distinct from the genuinely classic, whether in time or in quality.[1]

[1] The distinction between these two terms is not always clear, and one is at times tempted to conclude that they really refer to the same tendency, the use of one or the other being determined by the sympathy or antipathy of the critic employing it. In ordinary usage, the difference is mainly one of degree; pseudo-classic being employed more frequently when the excess of the formal element over everything else is so pronounced as to bring about an inferiority that must be acknowledged; while neo-classic denotes (without judg-

V

We turn now to the poetry itself produced in the period when this neo-classic criticism was prevalent, to inquire what are its characteristic qualities, and how far it has anything in common with the essentially classic.

The passage from Pope just quoted is typical enough of a large part of eighteenth-century verse. Couched in admirably concise and pointed diction, and set to a metre of perfect regularity and marvelously fitted to its purpose, the *Essay on Criticism* is literature of a quality which must be treated with respect. The writer has set before him the best models, and, even at this early stage of his career, has mastered the means appropriate to his ends and turned out a triumph of technical skill. Judgment, the power which in the view of the time gave structure and strength to a poem,

ing) modern works exhibiting classical tendencies, or produced in modern periods of marked formalism.

It is worth noting, perhaps, that our use of pseudo-romantic was not exactly parallel to this. We applied that term to Gothic novels and the like, which pretended to be highly imaginative, but were not; the pseudo-classicist is narrowly partisan, but is not necessarily insincere. He is a classicist at once mannered and extreme; a rationalist whose lack of the balancing qualities brings him to the limits of art.

is everywhere apparent; and wit, whether taken in the sense of fancy, the power of noting unsuspected resemblances, or in the modern sense, decorates the work throughout. Perfection of form, then, it has in a high degree; and both in this and in the theoretical discussion which forms its content the strength of the rational element is obvious. But what of imagination and the sense of fact? It can hardly be maintained that anywhere in it the element of imagination rises above the level of fancy. Neat similes occur here and there; metaphorical expressions and illuminating allusions are frequent; but of the larger constructive uses of imagination there is hardly a trace. Generalization, where it is employed, is logical, not a matter of intuition; and there is no vision of an ideal world. Neither is the sense of fact much in evidence. The subject-matter is largely abstract theory; and when the writer turns aside to illustrate by concrete instances, we get the impression, not of a first hand reaction from real men and books, but of the clever retailing of conventional estimates.

Our examination of this poem, then, leads to the conclusion, that it does not contain

that balance of qualities which produces the absolute masterpiece; nor even that mere predominance of reason over imagination and the sense of fact which would give us a classical masterpiece; but rather that it exhibits that monopolizing of the writer's whole energy by the one factor of reason, to the crushing out of the other elements, which has raised the question from his day to ours as to whether such a work is poetry at all. Considered as poetry, it is an excellent instance of the vicious extreme of the classical tendency; though considered as criticism, it is an admirably put summary of the doctrine of the prevailing school.

But we cannot take the *Essay on Criticism* as completely representative of Pope or his time. Much, it is true, of Pope's work belongs to the same class, moral, philosophical, and political ideas taking the place of critical. But in *The Rape of the Lock* the imagination is under no such eclipse, and the trivial episode which suggested it is lifted by a combination of whimsical idealization and skillful following of the devices of mock-heroic tradition into a genuinely artistic conception. Further, the sense of fact comes to its own;

and the poem is rich in vivid sketches of contemporary manners. There is still, of course, a predominating influence of the deliberate care for form; neither the imaginative structure, nor the zeal for truth of observation seizes the author with such force as to get upon equal terms with his judgment; and the poem, in its strength as well as in its limitations, is a classical masterpiece in its kind. For an absolute masterpiece, it has neither sufficient balance of qualities nor sufficient intensity.

In his satirical work, Pope rises to still higher levels, though satire, not without grounds, is often regarded as the least favorable to poetry of all forms of verse. The humorous element so important here falls to be discussed in a later chapter; but a partial answer to our question can be obtained without considering it. In satire of any vitality there is little likelihood of having to search far for evidence of the sense of fact. This form is usually the outcome of direct experience and observation of men and manners; and whatever heightening and polishing it may undergo, the actuality which is its basis remains an important factor. Pope illustrates this well; for

in the portraits of friends and enemies in which his satires abound, there is no lack of realism. Let us examine one of the most famous of these — the portrait of Addison which finally found a place in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot:*

> Peace to all such! but were there One whose fires
> True Genius kindles, and fair Fame inspires;
> Blest with each talent and each art to please,
> And born to write, converse, and live with ease:
> Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,
> Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne;
> View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,
> And hate for arts that caus'd himself to rise;
> Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
> And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;
> Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,
> Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;
> Alike reserv'd to blame or to commend,
> A tim'rous foe, and a suspicious friend;
> Dreading ev'n fools, by Flatterers besieg'd,
> And so obliging, that he ne'er oblig'd;
> Like Cato, give his little Senate laws,
> And sit attentive to his own applause;
> While Wits and Templars ev'ry sentence raise,
> And wonder with a foolish face of praise: —
> Who but must laugh, if such a man there be?
> Who would not weep, if Atticus were he?
>
> (vv. 193–214.)

The element of fact here need not be pointed out. The element of imagination is present not merely in the heightening of the tones of the portrait, but more in the clear

vision which holds the poet, and the vivid image which is presented to the mind of the reader; an image at once individual and of large typical significance, not of a throng of reported details, but of a vital whole, a genuine imaginative synthesis. And present here, as in all Pope's work, is his splendid sense of form, the powerful directing intellect, manifest in the selection of qualities to be exposed, in the choice of the fitting word or phrase, in the proportions, in the brilliant clarity of outline. Realistic in observation, imaginative in conception, classical in expression, with an underlying intensity of feeling, the portrait exhibits an admirable balance of qualities and rises into the sphere of great poetry.

Space will not permit the examination of the work of other poets of this period; but we may fairly take Pope as representative. Could we consider the verse of Dryden, of Swift, or of Dr. Johnson, we should come to the same general conclusions, though with varieties of emphasis. We should find a large quantity of verse characterized by correctness of form, a careful attention to models, and exhibiting a vigorous intellectual power, yet lacking at times direct touch with reality, and still

oftener "the vision and the faculty divine." This is what we understand by neo-classical poetry; since its weakness lies in an excessive following of classical tendencies, and in the feebleness or absence of the balancing qualities. We should find, as we seldom find in Pope, satirical poetry where the virulent reporting of the observed vices and follies of men swamps not only the imagination, but even the deliberate attention to form, and exhibits a dismal realism. We should find a considerable amount of writing possessing all three fundamental elements, but the rational element both in content and in form clearly in predominance, so that the resultant poetry is fairly described as classical. And, finally, we should find now and again passages rather than whole poems, in which an approach to the ideal equilibrium is achieved, and great poetry results.

The author in whose works passages belonging to these last two classes can most easily be found was, indeed, contemporary with Dryden, and produced his greatest poetry in the period of the Restoration; yet, being in that age, he was not of it. "His soul was like a star, and dwelt apart." Milton, by virtue of his

command of exquisite form, his assimilation of a vast and lofty tradition, and his power of creating the beauty that satisfies while it excites, and that finally subdues us to its own repose, is surely entitled to be called our greatest classical poet. He would have earned this rank by *Samson Agonistes* alone, the most perfect example, on a considerable scale, of the classical tendency in English literature. It is only because Milton is so much else, is so richly endowed on the other sides of his nature, that we refrain from insisting on the epithet classical, lest it deprive him of a greater honor.

VI

Classical poetry, however, is not confined to the period of Milton and Dryden and Pope. It will help to clarify still further our conception of the quality resulting from a predominance of the rational element if we carry our inquiry into the so-called Romantic period, and it will at the same time remind us of that complex nature of literary periods which it is so easy to assert and so difficult to keep in mind.

Probably no single poem brought upon the Romantic Movement in England more obloquy than Wordsworth's *Excursion*. Various

causes combined to draw upon it the shafts of the early critics of Romanticism, and its prominence as an object of attack by the hostile party led to its being regarded as a characteristically romantic product. This is a profoundly mistaken view. There are many kinds of things to be found in the vast tracts of *The Excursion*, realistic descriptions of landscape and of persons, expressions of a romantic feeling for nature and of a romantic interest in intimately personal aspirations, pieces of sentimental narrative, and much else; but the poem is prevailingly didactic. Pope's *Essay on Man* is not more so, and if we cannot group it with that work as an extreme instance of classical tendencies, it is partly because of the occasional romantic and realistic passages, but more because it lacks the brilliance of form of Pope's work. Take a specimen:

> One adequate support
> For the calamities of mortal life
> Exists — one only ; an assured belief
> That the procession of our fate, howe'er
> Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
> Of infinite benevolence and power ;
> Whose everlasting purposes embrace
> All accidents, converting them to good.
> (*The Excursion*, IV, 10–17.)

Here is a plain statement of theological belief, so plain that of our three fundamental elements, one can discern reason and reason only. If this were poetry, it would be classical poetry; but reason is employed only on the content; there is little or no care for form, and it escapes being classical poetry, not by being romantic, but by being prose. There are thousands of such lines in *The Excursion;* and the reason for my citing this negative instance is to emphasize the fact that not all the failures of the romantic poets are romantic failures — not all are failures from excess of imagination.

A more successful instance is found in Wordsworth's retelling of the story of Laodamia. The Greek subject may have influenced Wordsworth in his method of treatment; but it is the method of treatment and not the subject that makes the poem in our sense classical. Imaginative power is abundantly present in the vivid presentation of the pathetic reunion of the wife with the shade of her dead husband; but there is notably absent the homeliness of detail that gives their familiar realistic quality to most of Wordsworth's narratives. But one is more impressed with the simplicity and restraint of the picture, the dignity of the

expression, the subordination of the parts for the sake of the calm unity of the whole. The result is comparable to the design on a Greek vase. Observe, too, how the movement of the verse unites with the diction, more formal than Wordsworth generally employs in narrative, to convey the sense of repose:

> This visage tells thee that my doom is past:
> Nor should the change be mourned, even if the joys
> Of sense were able to return as fast
> And surely as they vanish. Earth destroys
> Those raptures duly — Erebus disdains:
> Calm pleasures there abide — majestic pains.
>
> Be taught, O faithful Consort, to control
> Rebellious passion: for the Gods approve
> The depth, and not the tumult, of the soul;
> A fervent, not ungovernable, love.
> Thy transports moderate; and meekly mourn
> When I depart, for brief is my sojourn.

Here we have the predominance of the rational element both in content and form, imagination and actuality subordinate but sufficient and the result a genuine piece of classical poetry. It is perhaps worth noting that Wordsworth confessed that this poem "cost me more trouble than almost any thing of equal length I have ever written."

But the chief traitor in the romantic camp was Byron. Though in his own day the most

popular of the romantic poets in England, and conscious of his influence in giving the movement vogue, Byron yet kept himself apart, and adopted an attitude towards his fellow romanticists which was at times condescending, at others openly hostile. He frankly avowed his admiration of Pope, and his first successful poems were written in imitation of him. He had none of the abhorrence of neo-classical formalism so strongly expressed by men like Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats. Although he wrote much romantic poetry, he wrote more that was merely sentimental; and his most brilliant achievement was a satire. It has now come to be recognized that Byron is no longer to be classed as purely, or perhaps even as primarily, a romantic poet.

In Byron's work, then, we might expect to find examples of classicism in the midst of a romantic era: not to be sure in *Childe Harold*, or the Oriental love romances like *The Giaour* and *The Corsair*, but in the great mass of his satirical verse. There we do indeed find an abundance of couplets, more or less in the manner of Pope, usually vigorous, sometimes sparkling and pointed. These things are certainly not romantic: but we have already noted

that classical is not the only antithesis to that term. Satire is often classical; I have already quoted Pope's satire on Addison as an admirable example of this, but it is impossible to regard all satire as classical. When the satirist rises above ill-natured description of actual people and practices that he dislikes, employs his generalizing power and produces types with a broad representative and permanent human significance; when these types are set forth with that regard for correctness of form on which we have already dwelt, then we may have satire that deserves to be called classical. But examples of this are hard to find in Byron. His early satires are for the most part venomous and unscrupulous assaults upon individuals; and whatever their justification or their truth, it is not to be found in a permanent typical value. In *Don Juan* he keeps clear, as a rule, from attacks on persons and takes a wider range; but here too the method is realistic, though the object is society and manners rather than men. Further, in both earlier and later work, the form has too little polish to merit by itself the epithet classic. Byron was too impatient, too headlong, too much of an improviser, to bestow on his work that labor

of pruning and finishing that gives the satire of Pope a beauty of technical perfection which pleases even when the object of his wrath has ceased to interest. Humorist, sentimentalist, realist, — all these, as we shall see, Byron was besides romanticist; but classicist he was not. He touched the writers of the neo-classical period at many points, but not where they showed most of the genuinely classical spirit.

The difficulty of finding clear examples of distinctly classical work among the romantic poets is not due to a constant overwhelming predominance of the imaginative element, but to the fact that imagination was so rife among them that even when the rational element and the zeal for form asserted themselves, a considerable degree of imagination was apt to persist, with the result of a more perfect equilibrium than is often found in the preceding age. Thus it will be at once admitted that in the early work of Keats, imagination is apt to be in excess. *Endymion* is a riot of imaginative impulses, most of them abortive; and the whole poem falls limp and draggled from the lack of a strain of clear thinking and a directing sense of form. A year or two later, so extraordinarily rapid was the development of this genius, these

missing elements had been captured, and we find the poet producing work like the *Ode to a Nightingale* and the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. Abundant sense of fact Keats had always possessed; and now in his great masterpieces the errant imagination has been brought into control by a newly achieved power of restraint, thought has added order without extinguishing vision, real and ideal elements are wedded in a perfect union, and the loftiest poetic beauty results.

Another instance of the same fortunate combination may close this part of our discussion. Landor has always been a perplexity to the makers of text-books, because he was so difficult to classify. Much of this difficulty lies in the very balance of qualities we have been glorifying, though certain other lacks bring him down in the scale. But at times he rises above his defects, and in a handful of all but perfect utterances shows himself a great master. Take as an example his *Iphigeneia:*

> Iphigeneia, when she heard her doom
> At Aulis, and when all beside the king
> Had gone away, took his right hand, and said,
> "O father, I am young and very happy.
> I do not think the pious Calchas heard
> Distinctly what the Goddess spake. Old age

Obscures the senses. If my nurse, who knew
My voice so well, sometimes misunderstood,
While I was resting on her knee both arms
And hitting it to make her mind my words,
And looking in her face, and she in mine,
Might not he also hear one word amiss,
Spoken from so far off, even from Olympus?"
The father placed his cheek upon her head,
And tears dropt down it, but the king of men
Replied not. Then the maiden spake once more.
"O father! sayst thou nothing? Hear'st thou not
Me, whom thou ever hast, until this hour,
Listen'd to fondly, and awaken'd me
To hear my voice amid the voice of birds,
When it was inarticulate as theirs,
And the dawn deadened it within the nest?"
He moved her gently from him, silent still,
And this, and this alone, brought tears from her,
Altho' she saw fate nearer: then with sighs,
"I thought to have laid down my hair before
Benignant Artemis, and not have dimm'd
Her polisht altar with my virgin blood:
I thought to have selected the white flowers
To please the nymphs, and to have askt of each
By name, and with no sorrowful regret,
Whether, since both my parents will'd the change,
I might at Hymen's feet bend my clipt brow;
And (after these who mind us girls the most)
Adore our own Athena, that she would
Regard me mildly with her azure eyes.
But, father! to see you no more, and see
Your love, O father! go ere I am gone!"
Gently he moved her off, and drew her back,
Bending his lofty head far over hers,
And the dark depths of nature heaved and burst.
He turn'd away; not far, but silent still.
She now first shudder'd; for in him, so nigh,

So long a silence seem'd the approach of death,
And like it. Once again she rais'd her voice.
"O father! if the ships are now detain'd
And all your vows move not the Gods above,
When the knife strikes me there will be one prayer
The less to them: and purer can there be
Any, or more fervent than the daughter's prayer
For her dear father's safety and success?"
A groan that shook him shook not his resolve;
An aged man now enter'd, and without
One word, stept slowly on, and took the wrist
Of the pale maiden. She lookt up, and saw
The fillet of the priest and calm cold eyes.
Then turn'd she where her parent stood, and cried,
"O father! grieve no more: the ships can sail!"

Here we have a sufficient grasp on the actual, or at least no excessive remoteness from the world of experience; a vivid imaging of the external scene; a delicate and tender sympathy with the emotion of the characters; and a superb controlling of all the elements of the composition in the interests of simplicity, unity, and proportion. Yet the conscious art of the piece does not lessen the intensity of the conception, so that the whole group stands out with an almost statuesque relief, in an atmosphere at once clear and soft. Such is the nobility of beauty that results when the classical spirit is given its place in an age of romance.

CHAPTER V

THE SENSE OF FACT AND REALISM

I

Realism is the Cinderella of the poetic family. The elder sisters, Classicism and Romanticism, have long been recognized, and have had great ages named in their honor, but they have tended to ignore their obscure little sister, and either to deny her rights as a member of the family, or to admit her as, at most, a poor and distant relation. Yet she has been in the kitchen all the time, supplying to her haughty sisters the necessaries of life. Of late, signs have not been wanting that the Prince has found her and that she is coming to her own; but the history of poetry in the past shows her pretty consistently left sitting on the earth alone, sordid and foul.

It is, indeed, not difficult to see why Realism should have been so often left out of the poetic account. The imagination working in isolation may produce nonsense; yet it is likely to be recognized as poetic nonsense: the uninspired reason may give us empty form, without soul;

yet the form may have elements of beauty: but the sense of fact, supplying material unillumined by imagination and unformed by the judgment, though it may get recognition from history or science, seems to have little or nothing to do with art. More imperatively than the other elements does it demand the balance of their presence if poetry is to be the result.

Yet there can be no question that it also is essential. Without direct contact with life and the actual world, poetry cannot remain sane and vital. Observation and experience are the ballast needed to give imagination steadiness; they supply much of the material to which reason gives form. Without them, imagination is a runaway balloon, which soars, indeed, but rapidly passes out of human reach and is lost; reason is a dealer in empty forms, a refurbisher of tradition living once, but — in the absence of fresh contact with reality — becoming ever more and more abstract and lifeless. Both the classic and the romantic tendencies, when they have run to dangerous extremes, regain strength and vitality, like the giant Antæus, by coming once more into touch with mother earth.

In the history of prose fiction the antithesis of romantic and realistic has been abundantly recognized, the classical being in this field the neglected element; but in the history of poetry this renewing effect of the sense of fact, though often manifested, has yet been strangely ignored. It has appeared as a reaction from both classicism and romanticism, but has been called by either of these names rather than by its own. Abundant examples of this error can be found in the eighteenth century, a period in which recent critics have paid much attention to the supposed conflict of the more generally recognized tendencies. Thus James Thomson has been given much prominence on account of his supposed importance as a romantic poet in an age prevailingly neo-classic. It may be admitted at once that this is not without justification. Take a couple of stanzas from the opening of *The Castle of Indolence:*

In lowly dale, fast by a river side,
With woody hill o'er hill encompass'd round,
A most enchanting wizard did abide,
Than whom a fiend more fell is no where found.
It was, I ween, a lovely spot of ground;
And there a season atween June and May,
Half prankt with spring, with summer half imbrown'd,
A listless climate made, where, sooth to say,
No living wight could work, ne cared even for play.

. . . . . .

A pleasing land of drowsy-head it was,
Of dreams that wave before the half-shut eye
And of gay castles in the clouds that pass,
For ever flushing round a summer sky ;
There eke the soft delights, that witchingly
Instil a wanton sweetness through the breast,
And the calm pleasures always hover'd nigh ;
But whate'er smack'd of noyance, or unrest,
Was far far off expell'd from this delicious nest.

A clearer contrast with both the form and spirit of the prevailing school of Pope could hardly be imagined ; and the freedom from any realistic tendency is not less marked. In this poem Thomson takes a deliberate journey into Spenser's Land of Faerie, adopts the master's form of verse, his diction, his type of allegory, and so far as he can, his style of thought and imagery. As a result, save in the respect that it is confessedly a literary imitation rather than purely an expression of individual temperament, he produces a thorough-going piece of romantic art.

But it is not this poem on which the main stress is laid when Thomson is hailed as a reviver of romance, but his much more widely influential *Seasons*. These elaborate descriptions of landscape and the weather certainly afford a strong contrast to the contemporary preoccupation with social life in cities. But

before we accept this as evidence of a romantic reaction against classicism further consideration is necessary. It is true that the age of Anne and of George I dealt, in its literature, largely with town life, yet this is not the characteristic by virtue of which it can be called classical or even neo-classical. To a man of Thomson's rural upbringing, the materials for poetry of polite society, and perhaps interest in it, were lacking, and to the public his extension of the field of verse came as a relief from monotony. To see in what direction this relief was found, let us examine a typical passage:

> Home, from his morning task, the swain retreats;
> His flock before him stepping to the fold;
> While the full-udder'd mother lows around
> The cheerful cottage, then expecting food,
> The food of innocence and health! The daw,
> The rook and magpie, to the grey-grown oaks
> That the calm village in their verdant arms,
> Sheltering, embrace, direct their lazy flight;
> Where on the mingling boughs they sit embower'd,
> All the hot noon, till cooler hours arise.
> Fain, underneath, the household fowls convene;
> And, in a corner of the buzzing shade,
> The house dog, with the vacant greyhound, lies
> Out-stretch'd and sleeps.
>
> (*Summer*, 220–233.)

The recollective imagination is undoubtedly active here: the poet calls up from a well-stored

memory, a series of clearly seen images. But with this the function of the imagination almost ceases; the sheer memory of what has been observed dominates so far as content is concerned, and the result is little more than an elaborately phrased enumeration of details. At times Thomson does this somewhat more interestingly: the chosen epithet has not infrequently a penetrating power that brings before us some essential characteristic, "springing the imagination," to use Meredith's phrase. But in general a somewhat literal rendering of fact is the prevailing method. Professor Beers has pointed out a few passages in which Thomson treats the more awe-inspiring aspects of nature in an approach to the romantic manner, but he admits that these are merely occasional. On the other hand, there is much description by hearsay, and no small amount of purely conventional matter that comes close to the landscape of Pope's *Windsor Forest.* Further, it will be observed that though Thomson uses blank verse instead of the couplet, his language is profusely decorated with that mannered and pretentious poetic diction that roused the indignation of Wordsworth against the neo-classical tradition. The farmer appears

as the "swain," the cow as "the full-udder'd mother," milk as "the food of innocence and health," the hens do not gather, "the household fowls convene," the greyhound is not idle but "vacant." In diction, clearly, Thomson is no reformer.

It appears, then, that this supposed leader of the romantic revolt must base his claim chiefly on the imitative Spenserianism of *The Castle of Indolence*, and that *The Seasons* shows him reacting from neo-classicism only in the possession of a realistic method in the treatment of nature, while his language remains purely neo-classic.

Later in the century we find a somewhat similar phenomenon in Cowper. The vogue of Thomson had produced many imitators both at home and abroad, so that when we come to the descriptive writing of Cowper, it is with no shock of contrast. But Cowper was a finer and sincerer spirit than Thomson, and his pictorial passages are admirable examples of the poetry of observation of nature, in which a loving sense of the fact is illumined by imaginative insight and regulated by a feeling for traditional form not too oppressive.

Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds
Exhilarate the spirit, and restore
The tone of languid nature. Mighty winds,
That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood
Of ancient growth, make music not unlike
The dash of ocean on his winding shore,
And lull the spirit while they fill the mind;
Unnumber'd branches waving in the blast,
And all their leaves fast fluttering, all at once.
Nor less composure waits upon the roar
Of distant floods, or on the softer voice
Of neighbouring fountain, or of rills *that slip*
Through the cleft rock, and, chiming as they fall
Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length
In matted grass, that with a livelier green
Betrays the secret of their silent course.
(*The Task*, I, 181–196.)

In such a passage we are made to share the response of a finely sensitive perception to the more delicately stimulating of natural phenomena. It exhibits clearly the contribution to poetry of the realistic tendency, and it is the outcome, not of any reactionary or reforming purpose, but merely of the natural balance of qualities in the poet's temperament.

Very differently did George Crabbe feel with regard to this matter. In his youth Crabbe had been brought up under hard circumstances in the somewhat unpicturesque scenery of the coast of Suffolk. These physical surroundings stamped themselves on his memory, and bore

fruit after many days. The traditional form in which classical poetry had sought to cater to the natural taste for country life was the pastoral; but as this form came down from century to century it gathered ever new features and uses, and left the actual country farther and farther behind it. The pastorals of Philips and Pope are extreme examples of the tendency of a literary tradition to become mannered and artificial, and it was to be supposed that every one had long since given up regarding this literary mode as anything but quaintly decorative. Not so George Crabbe. The contrast between the golden world of the artificial pastoral, or even the idealized country life of *The Deserted Village*, and the actual conditions of the English laborer as he knew him, roused him to fierce resentment, and he bursts into verse as a professed realist, yielding to no imaginative vision, and caring for form only so far as it helped to make his protest effective.

> Fled are those times, when in harmonious strains
> The rustic poet praised his native plains :
> No shepherds now, in smooth alternate verse,
> Their country's beauty or their nymphs' rehearse ;
> Yet still for these we frame the tender strain,
> Still in our lays fond Corydons complain,

And shepherds' boys their amorous pains reveal,
The only pains, alas ! they never feel.
On Mincio's banks, in Cæsar's bounteous reign,
If Tityrus found the Golden Age again,
Must sleepy bards the flattering dream prolong,
Mechanic echoes of the Mantuan song ?
From Truth and Nature shall we widely stray,
Where Virgil, not where Fancy, leads the way ?
. . . . . .
I grant indeed that fields and flocks have charms
For him that grazes, or for him that farms ;
But when amid such pleasing scenes I trace
The poor laborious natives of the place,
And see the mid-day sun, with fervid ray,
On their bare heads and dewy temples play ;
While some, with feebler heads and fainter hearts,
Deplore their fortune, yet sustain their parts :
Then shall I dare these real ills to hide
In tinsel trappings of poetic pride ?
No ; cast by Fortune on a frowning coast,
Which neither groves nor happy valleys boast ;
Where other cares than those the Muse relates,
And other shepherds dwell with other mates ;
By such examples taught, I paint the Cot
As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not.
. . . . . .
Lo ! where the heath, with withering brake grown o'er,
Lends the light turf that warms the neighbouring poor ;
From thence a length of burning sand appears,
Where the thin harvest waves its wither'd ears ;
Rank weeds, that every art and care defy,
Reign o'er the land, and rob the blighted rye :
There thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,
And to the ragged infant threaten war . . .
With mingled tints the rocky coasts abound,
And a sad splendour vainly shines around.

(*The Village*, 1, 7 ff.)

Nowhere in English poetry can one find pictures so relentlessly dismal as these of Crabbe, nowhere a poet so intent on truth to reality as his single aim. Yet the result is not purely objective : the scene is colored by the writer's personality, the gloom is heightened by his imagination. The facts that met his eye were not so unremittingly squalid ; the indignation which burned in his heart lifted his pictures above the level of a poor-law report, and made him a poet, though a humble one, in spite of himself. But he remained a realist or nothing.

The greatest realistic poet ot the century had an experience of rural life and its hardships more wretched and prolonged by far than was enclosed in the early years of Crabbe. It is unnecessary to present again the evidence that Robert Burns knew what he was writing about when he sang of the peasant's lot; yet here we have no such pictures of unrelieved gloom as fill the pages of the English parson, though one is convinced that there is no less truth.

Burns, like the other realists who offer a contrast to neo-classical convention, has been regarded as a reviver of romanticism ; and this

so persistently that one must hesitate about taking a contrary view. His work falls into three main classes: satire, descriptive and narrative verse, and lyric. By virtue of the last of these, the romanticists have, it would seem, a fair claim to him. We have already seen that lyric is the peculiarly romantic form of poetry, since it is, more directly than any other, the utterance of the personal and intimate mood of the individual soul. The four lines so much admired by Byron are a sufficient reminder of how poignantly Burns could give expression to personal longing:

> Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
> Had we never lov'd sae blindly,
> Never met — or never parted —
> We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

There is a good deal of this in Burns, and I do not wish to deny that he is a notable figure in the reappearance of the subjective lyric in Britain. Yet, if we study his songs, certain distinctions are forced upon our notice. In the case of many of them, it would be absurd to regard them as outpourings of the aspirations of the soul, yearnings after the ideal and unattainable. The soul, as a rule, is very little concerned in the aspirations ex-

pressed in Burns's songs, what he yearns after is often not ideal, but very real — the girl binding sheaves in the next row, for example — and he has little fear of finding her unattainable. The contrast between Burns's typical love-songs and the pure lyric of romantic aspiration will be perceived at once if we put beside one of them a characteristic production of Shelley's:

O world ! O life ! O time !
On whose last steps I climb,
  Trembling at that where I had stood before ;
When will return the glory of your prime ?
  No more — Oh, never more !

Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight ;
  Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar
Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight
  No more — Oh, never more !

Now Burns:

Now in her green mantle blythe Nature arrays,
And listens the lambkins that bleat o'er the braes,
While birds warble welcomes in ilka green shaw,
But to me it 's delightless — my Nanie 's awa.

The snawdrap and primrose our woodlands adorn,
And violets bathe in the weet o' the morn.
They pain my sad bosom, sae sweetly they blaw :
They mind me o' Nanie — and Nanie 's awa.

Thou lav'rock, that springs frae the dews of the lawn
The shepherd to warn o' the grey-breaking dawn,
And thou mellow mavis, that hails the night-fa',
Give over for pity — my Nanie 's awa.

Come Autumn, sae pensive in yellow and grey,
And soothe me wi' tidings o' Nature's decay!
The dark dreary Winter and wild-driving snaw
Alane can delight me — now Nanie 's awa.

Burns's song has a strain of delicate sentiment; the imaginative atmosphere is evident in the pervasiveness of the so-called pathetic fallacy; but at bottom it is a very definite and human expression of longing for a definite and human girl. The imaginative element is ancillary, the actual fact is in the foreground; while in Shelley's poem, the thing in the foreground is the consciousness of a vague yearning for an ideal glory that has passed away. This song is a very fair example of the work of Burns: some are more highly imaginative, many more earthly and literal; the best are masterpieces that might have been chosen to illustrate our ideal balance of qualities. A romantic strain Burns surely exhibits; but on the whole he is a realist even in his songs.

About the other two groups into which I have classified his work there is less need for detailed discussion. Satire, we have noted, may

be inspired by emotion so intense that the imagination is aroused, and real poetry results; but we have not yet found imagination so abundant as to produce a romantic satire. Nor do we find it in Burns. The scathing exposure of the hypocrisy of the Auld Licht elders and ministers, the abuses cloaked by religion at the Holy Fair, the moral and physical defects of the poet's enemies, — such themes as these are treated with a sturdy adherence to the facts of the individual case. Occasionally, as in the address *To the Unco Guid, or the Rigidly Righteous*, he rises above the individual, and gives us good classical satire of the type; but in general, in this group also he is predominatingly a realist.

The same may be said with regard to his descriptive and narrative poetry. In *The Cotter's Saturday Night* the realism is softened by sentiment, in *Tam o' Shanter* it is lightened by humor, in *The Jolly Beggars* it is transformed by a stupendous achievement of sympathy into an unsurpassed expression of the sheer joy of living; but the fundamental characteristic of all these poems is a persistent adherence to the observed fact. "Burns's world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and

Scotch manners" which so offended the delicate nostrils of Matthew Arnold, was the only world Burns really knew, and he obeyed his genius and served his people by depicting it with an unsurpassed vividness and truth.

In our discussion of the imaginative element in the romantic poetry of nature, we found abundant illustrations in the work of Wordsworth. But it is a mistake to suppose that all, or nearly all, of Wordsworth's nature poetry is dominated by the imagination. Much of it derives its interest and value, not from its relation to the poet's spiritual experiences, or from the mystery and suggestiveness of pictures of wild glens and towering mountains, but from a humble faithfulness to the mere external face of nature. Even the *Tintern Abbey* lines begin with a piece of description touched with fancy, but not in itself notably romantic; and the superb opening landscape of *The Excursion*, while admirably composed and vividly presented, is a realistic rather than a romantic masterpiece.

> 'T was summer, and the sun had mounted high:
> Southward the landscape indistinctly glared
> Through a pale steam; but all the northern downs,
> In clearest air ascending, showed far off
> A surface dappled o'er with shadows flung

From brooding clouds ; shadows that lay in spots
Determined and unmoved, with steady beams
Of bright and pleasant sunshine interposed ;
To him most pleasant who on soft cool moss
Extends his careless limbs along the front
Of some huge cave, whose rocky ceiling casts
A twilight of its own, an ample shade,
Where the wren warbles, while the dreaming man,
Half conscious of the soothing melody,
With sidelong eye looks out upon the scene,
By power of that impending covert, thrown
To finer distance.

Passages such as this, void of metaphysical significance, or of any emotion except that called forth by pure natural beauty, are common enough in Wordsworth, though they have been overshadowed in critical writing by discussion of his more subjective work. Not only are Wordsworth's successful pieces often primarily realistic triumphs, but some of his failures are due to an excess of realism, neither relieved by beauty of form nor raised by imagination. In a note to the poem called *The Thorn*, he tells us that he was impressed by the appearance of a thorn-bush on the ridge of Quantock Hill, seen on a stormy day; and he was moved to try by some invention to make it permanently an impressive object, as the storm had made it to his eyes. The invention, unfortunately, proved inadequate; and the

thorn was described in all its ugliness without becoming impressive. And if here his imagination failed him, his sense of form played him false also, and led him to the choice of a stanza and a metre that only emphasized the barrenness of the conception. Nothing is left then but plain literal enumeration of external attributes:

> There is a Thorn — it looks so old,
> In truth, you 'd find it hard to say
> How it could ever have been young,
> It looks so old and grey.
> Not higher than a two years' child
> It stands erect, this aged Thorn;
> No leaves it has, no prickly points;
> It is a mass of knotted joints,
> A wretched thing forlorn.
> It stands erect, and like a stone
> With lichens is it overgrown.

The lichens get another stanza; then one is given to a "little muddy pond three yards beyond"; then two to a hill of moss, just half a foot in height, and so on. Seldom was Wordsworth more nakedly uninspired.

It is worth noting that in neither of the cases of poetic failure which the course of the argument has led us to observe in Wordsworth is the cause to be found in excess of the im-

aginative element: one is unrelieved didacticism, the other real literalism, but neither is a romantic failure.

The poetry of Scott continues the tradition of his national literature in its abundance of natural description. Passages like his picture of the Trosachs at sunset in *The Lady of the Lake* are among the popular favorites in descriptive poetry, and it is easy to find in his poems evidence that he strongly shared the romantic sensibility to wild and lonely scenery. It is interesting, then, to remember that Wordsworth looked with an unfriendly eye on these set pieces of his more popular contemporary, and blamed him for making "inventories of Nature's beauties." The moment we hear the phrase, we recognize the method that Wordsworth is censuring, the tendency to produce a picture by a mere piling up of details by simple enumeration. The question then arises as to how far there is added to this matter-of-fact basis an imaginative element which justifies the usual estimate of Scott's treatment of scenery as romantic. The description of Edinburgh in the fourth canto of *Marmion* may be quoted as a fair specimen of his pictorial method:

Still on the spot Lord Marmion stay'd,
For fairer scene he ne'er survey'd.
When sated with the martial show
That peopled all the plain below,
The wandering eye could o'er it go,
And mark the distant city glow
With gloomy splendour red;
For on the smoke-wreaths, huge and slow,
That round her sable turrets flow,
The morning beams were shed,
And ting'd them with a lustre proud,
Like that which streaks a thunder-cloud.
Such dusky grandeur cloth'd the height,
Where the huge Castle holds its state,
And all the steep slope down,
Whose ridgy back heaves to the sky,
Pil'd deep and massy, close and high,
Mine own romantic town!
But northward far, with purer blaze,
On Ochil mountains fell the rays,
And as each heathy top they kiss'd,
It gleam'd a purple amethyst.
Yonder the shores of Fife you saw;
Here Preston-Bay and Berwick-Law!
And, broad between them roll'd,
The gallant Frith the eye might note,
Whose islands on its bosom float,
Like emeralds chas'd in gold.

(Canto IV, XXX.)

That this is a portrait landscape, drawn with a loving and accurate memory of every feature, will at once be conceded. If we compare it with the more absolutely romantic scenery in *Kubla Khan* or the shimmering

visions of Shelley, we at once recognize that it contains a strong realistic element. But mere inventory it surely is not. The powerful patriotic emotion which surges through it has quickened the poet's imagination, and has led to an idealization which is felt in the pulsing measure, the swelling diction showing pride in every adjective, and, above all, in the bestowal upon the scene of a magnificence of color which the scientific observer would seek in vain in that gray city by the northern sea. I do not think that it will be objected that this passage is exceptional in Scott. The patriotic emotion is often replaced by a heroic or romantic one rising out of the tale itself; but in general Scott's landscapes, while real and sometimes overcrowded, are suffused and unified by imagination and feeling. They are, in other words, romantic landscapes, but with a solid basis in observation and memory, thoroughly characteristic of Scott, who, with all his sympathy with romance, always kept his feet upon the ground. In very similar fashion, Scott's romantic medievalism had a firm foundation in his substantial archæological learning.

Another instance of realism as a supporting

but not a dominating quality is to be found in the descriptive poetry of Keats. In a previous chapter we noted that the weak element in Keats's early poetry was the intellectual, and that the invertebrate quality of *Endymion* was due mainly to a defective sense of form and a lack of rational coherence. As this missing element developed in the poet, the balance became more fairly adjusted, until he grew capable of the master work of the Odes. But the fault of Keats, when dealing with external nature, was never a lack of sense of fact. The passages already quoted[1] to show the suffusion of imagination in his descriptive poetry exhibited at the same time evidences of a delicate and precise observation. It is rare to find in Keats whole stretches of landscape transferred from nature to the page, feature by feature in their actual order, such as we find in Scott, and sometimes in Wordsworth. His realism appears rather in the apprehension of minute details, but these details are assembled because of their appeal to the same sense, or their suitability to a single mood, or because they have, as it were, a common flavor, not because of topographical proximity. An example oc-

[1] See *ante*, pp. 94–95.

curs in the list of "shapes of beauty" in the opening of *Endymion*, and another later in the same poem:

> O thou, to whom
> Broad leavéd fig-trees even now foredoom
> Their ripen'd fruitage; yellow girted bees
> Their golden honeycombs; our village leas
> Their fairest blossom'd beans and poppied corn;
> The chuckling linnet its five young unborn,
> To sing for thee; low creeping strawberries
> Their summer coolness; pent up butterflies
> Their freckled wings . . .
>
> (Book I, vv. 251–259.)

Such unity as passages like these possess is not structural, for that is precisely where the young poet is weak, but sensuous. Every epithet bears evidence of a vivid recollection of the thrill of actual physical experience. Had not Keats's imagination been so extraordinarily and persistently active, we should have been bound to regard him as a realistic artist: as it is, this vivid consciousness of actual sense impressions gave even his early work a certain element of stability, and when he finally achieved a mastery of form, made possible the triumphs of his highest achievement.

Shelley is all but a negative instance. The fault, it has been said, of Shelley's descriptions is that they do not describe; and in spite of

the splendor of his visions of mountain and sky and forest, our pleasure is apt to be lessened by the pervading sense of insubstantiality, and we often long to feel a touch of the actual earth. So complete is the dominance of the imaginative over the actual in Shelley, that even when he is presenting to us a concrete picture, he seeks to make it more vivid by an illustration drawn from the world of spiritual experience, thus reversing the usual process of bringing ideal conceptions within our reach by physical similes. Here is an example from *The Cenci:*

> The road . . . is rough and narrow,
> And winds with short turns down the precipice;
> And in its depths there is a mighty rock,
> Which has, from unimaginable years,
> Sustained itself with terror and with toil
> Over a gulf, and with the agony
> With which it clings seems slowly coming down;
> *Even as a wretched soul, hour after hour,*
> *Clings to the mass of life; yet clinging, leans:*
> *And leaning, makes more dark the dread abyss*
> *In which it fears to fall:* beneath this crag
> *Huge as despair, as if in weariness,*
> The melancholy mountain yawns below.
>
> (III, i, 244–257.)

To Shelley the physical is less real than the ideal, and has to be made present by figures

drawn from the world above the senses, in which the poet felt most at home.

There is no question that this weakness on the realistic side has narrowed the appeal of Shelley's poetry, and, I believe, lessened its absolute artistic value. But with him, too, one can perceive an increase in balance towards the close. In spite of large ideal and subjective elements in *Adonais*, it seems as if the objective fact of the death of Keats had sufficed to give ballast to the vessel, so that, to a much greater extent than in *Alastor*, for instance, he is able to steer to a fixed port. Similarly, the concrete plot supplied to him by the story of the Cenci family gave to this drama a quality of the actual which is rare in his other work; and which, though it may appeal less to the Shelley worshipper, is likely to give it, in the judgment of posterity, a place among the finest and most permanent of his productions.

II

The satirical way of writing has usually been treated as characteristic of classical periods, and as in itself a classical form; and we have, in a previous chapter, discussed ex-

amples of classical poetry from the satires of Pope. Yet it can be shown that such an assumption is due to a lack of discrimination, and that satire is not to be so disposed of in the lump. If we examine some typical specimens of satirical poetry from various periods we shall find that, while not infrequently both content and form show the appropriateness of the classical label, a considerably larger proportion of it is more accurately described as realistic. A vast deal of satire is little more than the transcribing, with the purpose of ridicule, of a succession of characteristics directly copied from the fact. The presence of more or less exaggeration does little to give classical quality, though it lessens the literal truth. And, at the risk of anticipation, it may be noted here that much satire is successful, not by virtue of any poetical quality whatsoever, but from an exuberance of humor and wit; and is thus outside of our immediate scope. This is true, for example, of a great part of the comedies of Aristophanes.

Some illumination may be gained from a consideration of so prominent a figure in the history of English satire as Ben Jonson. Compare for a moment his *Volpone* with his *Bartholomew Fair*. Both are beyond question

satire; both are highly effective. The former is an exposure of the vice of greed, and the method is the exhibition of half a dozen or more types of men, each with a well-marked characteristic, which, however, is mastered by the love of money. The father of an only son disinherits his child, a jealous husband risks the virtue of his wife, a fashionable lady endangers her reputation, a lawyer perjures himself, a judge would let justice miscarry, — all for financial gain; while the Fox himself, the incarnation of cunning used to satisfy unscrupulous greed, dupes them all. Apart from the qualities involved in the central idea of the play, local and individual details are almost completely absent; the conception stands out bold and clear in outline, admirable in balance and proportion, an ideal example of the fitting of means to ends, a masterpiece of classical art, and at the same time a scathing satire on human nature.

Bartholomew Fair is a picture of life among the citizens of London in Jonson's own time. The canvas is crowded with minute local, temporal, and personal detail; and the satire is mainly on the hypocritical sensuality of the Puritans of that place and time. Jonson was

too great an artist to leave this without permanent and universal elements: the vices of the Puritans are such as have been exemplified in many ages; the squalor of the Fair is reproduced in such popular carnivals in any country. But the emphasis is on the individual and local fact, not on the typical element; and the result is an almost unsurpassed Hogarthian picture of a bit of Elizabethan London. It is a masterpiece of realistic art, and again a scathing satire on human nature.

It is hardly necessary to argue further the necessity of discriminating in satire between the classical and the realistic. The criteria are to be found in the emphasis in classical satire on the typical in content, and on parsimony and relevance of detail in form; in realistic satire on truth to the individual and local in content, achieved by abundance and multiplicity of detail in form.

When a student turns from the comedies of Shakespeare to those of Molière, he is struck by a kind of thinness in the French dramatist which, at first, contrasts unfavorably with the superabundant richness, both in characterization and in incident, of the Englishman. But,

after longer study, he becomes aware of a fundamental distinction in method and aim, and sees that Molière is seeking to present a series of permanent types with a critical purpose, and that these would be clouded and obscured by excess of detail; while Shakespeare is presenting dramatically an interesting story, the hold of which is increased by the intimacy of our knowledge of the individual characters or by their ideal charm. Shakespeare's method is sometimes romantic, sometimes realistic, Molière is a master of classical satire.

When we come to the great satiric period in England, that of Dryden, Swift, and Pope, we find it more difficult to classify either men or works in as clear cut a fashion as this; for we constantly see both kinds exemplified not only by the same writer in different poems, but by the same poem in different passages. It appears further that in excessive realism lies a chief danger of satire regarded as poetry; for while it is hard to find an example of this form in which the author is in danger of losing sight of the actual, instances are abundant where the literal transcript of personal or local vices and follies is left untouched either by the imaginative insight

that sees the universal in the individual, or by the more deliberate process of rational generalization.

Examples have already been quoted from Pope in which he rose above literal personalities, and created a typical portrait like that of Atticus, which by perfection of formal expression, as well as by the universality of the attributes, retains for posterity its significance and interest. But it is hardly necessary to cite those endless passages crammed with obscure names and forgotten allusions, which footnotes may make intelligible but which nothing can ever again make interesting. In these dreary wastes the river of poetry is dissipated and lost in the sands of realistic detail.

How the case stands with Byron's satire, some indication was given in the previous chapter. The *Hints from Horace* and *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, often witty and pungent, are prevailingly individual and local: the motive is personal animus; no burning indignation against vice and folly in general raises him above pure description or caricature; and his art, as we have noted, is too careless and haphazard to attain to classical form. Hardly more permanent in their appeal are

social satires like *The Waltz*, though here contemporary manners instead of men are the object of criticism. Even *Don Juan*, superb performance as it is, owes much of its quality to other characteristics than those that make classical satire; and when it becomes poetry, it usually ceases to be satirical. As a satirist, Byron followed the lead of his eighteenth-century masters in their realism rather than in their classicism, and his wit rather than his generalizing power gives these verses their place in literature.

In poetry at large, then, but especially in description and satire, we find the sense of fact an important and even essential element, lending steadiness to imagination and supplying material to reason; producing, when it is in predominance, poetry with the tendency known as realistic, and resulting, when it exists in isolation or in excess, in its own characteristic kind of failure. And, lest the frequency and flatness of these failures should impress us unfairly, let us take leave of realism with the recollection that to this tendency belong the triumphs of the genius of Burns; and, outside of the period with which we are chiefly con-

cerned, that Chaucer, in those parts of his writing that remain most vital, has exhibited in realistic fashion his delicious humor, and his large and free sympathy with all sorts and conditions of men.

CHAPTER VI

INTENSITY IN POETRY

I

THE literary critics of the seventeenth century, especially in France, were fond of representing their poetic theories graphically, by drawing elaborate allegorical maps of the land of poetry. In such maps Epic, for example, might be represented as the chief city of the province of Higher Poetry, Burlesque as the capital of the marsh lands of the Lower Poetry, Satire an island far out at sea, and so forth. If for a moment we were to seek to imitate them, the view of poetry here proposed might be represented by the figure of a lofty mountain with a great plain on the top. Up the sides of this Parnassus labor the would-be poets, coming by the three main roads of imagination, reason, and the sense of fact. Those who have arrived at the top are camped on that side of the plateau next the road by which they ascended, and the camps are called by the names Romantic, Classic, and Realistic. There are other roads and other camps, but

so far we have concerned ourselves with only these three. The great leaders, however, are to be found, not in the heart of any one of these camps, but, in proportion to their greatness, towards the middle of the plateau. The farther from this great centre, the more partisan they become, and down the slopes on each side and out on the plains of prose one sees little figures waving their party banners and shouting their party cries, far from the summit of victory at whose centre is a great peace.

This symbol, however, leaves no suitable place for the representation of the fourth great fundamental quality, intensity. And as the figure is useless because it excludes this, so poetry which does not contain it is not poetry, however well-balanced it may be in regard to the other qualities. The ingredients have been thrown into the magic caldron, but the fire that should melt and fuse them has not been kindled. So all-important is the function of that quality of poetry which we must now examine.

This quality is known by many names, and I have chosen intensity, not because it is entirely satisfactory, but because it is, less than the others, blunted and obscured by vague and

ambiguous usage. It is what Hazlitt meant by "gusto," when he felt a work of art so thrill him that not only the sense immediately appealed to, but all the senses joyously responded to the touch. It is what Wordsworth meant when he said that the truth of poetry must not stand upon external testimony, but be carried alive into the heart by passion; when he claimed that a poet must be a man who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; when he called poetry the impassioned expression on the face of all science. It is what the modern critic means — when he means anything — by temperament. It is often called merely emotion, or feeling, or passion, and in these forms it most commonly manifests itself; but these terms are apt to be interpreted in too narrow or too wide a sense for our purpose. It may be regarded as a matter of degree: the degree of vividness with which the imaginative conception is visualized, the degree of clarity with which the intellect seizes its æsthetic problem and selects and arranges the essential elements, the degree of force and precision and fullness with which the fact is perceived and remembered. But this attachment to each of the other elements in turn,

and its apparent modification to suit the nature of each, does not detract from its fundamental importance.

In one sense, the consideration of this element brings us closer to the heart of the question of the nature of poetry than any of the others. So far we have been chiefly concerned with the poet himself, and with the equipment by means of which he achieves his results. The terms we have employed have explained qualities of the poem by reference to faculties in the poet; and although each of these qualities and faculties appeals to corresponding sensibilities in the reader, this latter side of the problem has been only occasionally treated. But in the discussion of intensity, we are not likely to say much regarding this state of excitation in the writer which does not hold, with little change, of the truly appreciative reader of poetry.

A distinguished scholar writing recently on poetics [1] has described the appropriate effect of poetry on the reader as a kind of ecstasy, which for the moment carries him out of the ordinary world of the waking consciousness into a kind of dream-world, where he sojourns with the

[1] J. A. Stewart, *The Myths of Plato*, Oxford, 1905, pp. 22 ff.

eternities, and where Time is not. Into the metaphysical discussion of the nature of this ecstasy the present writer is not competent to penetrate; but in the mere use of the word "ecstasy" we may find a recognition of the appropriate effect of that element which we have called intensity; and the state is to be attributed to the poet as well as to the reader, and to the poet in an even higher degree. Now, such a mood of ecstatic feeling is by its nature temporary; and intensity, viewed as a degree of the other activities we have considered, is an inconstant thing, seldom holding the same pitch for any great length of time. If, then, it is the fundamental and essential quality we have said, without which in some degree poetry does not exist, and without which in a high degree poetry cannot be great poetry, it would seem to follow that no piece of verse of considerable extent can be all poetry. This is a familiar and well-recognized conclusion. "Whatever specific import," says Coleridge, "we attach to the word, Poetry, there will be found involved in it, as a necessary consequence, that a poem of any length neither can be, nor ought to be, all poetry." Equally well known is Poe's attack upon the

long poem, which he finds to be a contradiction in terms. His reason is worth quoting at this point:

"I need scarcely observe that a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites by elevating the soul. The value of the poem is in the ratio of this elevating excitement. But all excitements are, through a psychal necessity, transient. That degree of excitement which would entitle a poem to be so called at all, cannot be sustained through a composition of any great length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, it flags — fails — a revulsion ensues — and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such."[1]

His phrase, "elevating excitement of the soul," by which he defines "the manifestation of the Poetic Principle," we thankfully receive as a corroboration of our view of the function of intensity. His main inference, while containing much truth, needs some modification. The ecstasy of which we have spoken is the culmination of a state of elevation and exhilaration, but in itself it is little more than momentary. It is no more capable of being

[1] Poe, *The Poetic Principle*, p. 1.

protracted over the half-hour which Poe allows than over half a day. If it were to be held that a poem to be poetical could only be coextensive with such a climactic experience, we should have to cut Poe's "poetical" poems down to a stanza or a line, or at times a phrase, or even a single kindling epithet. On the other hand, if we can still call it poetry while it moves on the high table-land of noble exhilaration from which the peaks of ecstasy rise, the range of possibility is increased far beyond the limit of half an hour. And indeed we know that there are books capable of sustaining us at a surprisingly high pitch of elevated excitement for hours; to which we may even return after interruption and find ourselves almost immediately caught up again, and carried along by the intensity of the author's conception.

II

From what has already been said it will be seen that it is difficult to illustrate this quality of intensity just as we have illustrated the other elements, since it manifests itself not in isolation or solitary predominance, but in and through one or more of the other quali-

ties. Yet one can find passages which are such culminating points as we have described, and which raise us to this point of ecstatic excitement, in which it seems as if it were sheer intensity rather than any more specific quality that produced the effect. Take some of the most famous lines in our literature as tests. When Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi* looks upon the face of the sister whom he has had murdered, he says,

> Cover her face : mine eyes dazzle : she died young.

These three sentences are matter-of-fact enough, yet the effect is not primarily realistic. They show great restraint in expression, yet it is not primarily felt as a triumph of classic form. Superficially considered, they hardly seem imaginative at all. This is because the imagination they display is not in the speaker, but in the dramatist, who gives us in a flash an awful glimpse into the soul of the criminal at the very moment when remorse sets in. The imagination is here the chief (but not the only) medium by which is brought about that intense realization of the situation and its attendant emotion that thrills us with horror.

In the same play, a similar power of bring-

ing the excitement to a climax without any apparent rhetorical devices is seen in the half-mad heroine's retort to her tormentors — "I am Duchess of Malfi still." The Elizabethan drama is thick-set with such electric utterances. Lady Macbeth's

> Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?

Lear's five-fold "Never," Antony's "I am dying, Egypt, dying," are Shakespearean examples; and the whole last scene of *Othello*, from the Moor's soliloquy, beginning,

> It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,

to "the bloody period," rises again and again to these utterances at white heat.

But it must not be supposed that the quality of intensity is displayed only in scenes of turbulent passion and in tragic catastrophes. It is found in the vivid realization of any mood, pathetic or humorous, energetic or placid, as well as harrowing. We have it in the calm utterance of the resignation of Manoa, in Milton's tragedy, after the death of Samson:

> Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise, or blame, nothing but well and fair,
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

We have it again in the imaginative wistfulness of Wordsworth's

> Will no one tell me what she sings? —
> Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
> For old, unhappy, far-off things,
> And battles long ago:

and even in the same poet's desolate line in *Michael*,

> And never lifted up a single stone.

It is equally there in the bacchanalian zest of Burns's chorus:

> We are na fou, we 're nae that fou,
> But just a drappie in our e'e!
> The cock may craw, the day may daw,
> And ay we 'll taste the barley-bree!

It is in the languor of the *Lotos-Eaters*

> Resting weary limbs at last on beds of asphodel,

as well as in the strenuousness of *Ulysses*, who

> Drunk delight of battle with his peers,
> Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.

III

It is not without significance that in most of the instances quoted, the intensity which is exhibited is an imaginative intensity. The examples were not chosen with this in view, but have been given as they came to mind. But

of our three fundamental qualities, it is clearly imagination that most readily kindles emotion, as emotion in turn awakens imagination. It is on this account that romantic poetry offers most freely examples of intensity, and that there exists a common impression that Romanticism is mainly characterized by an abundant display of feeling. But, as has already been pointed out, not all feeling is poetic feeling, and both persons and words may overflow with emotion without being in any notable degree poetic. The feeling, as we have tried to show, must be attached to those other elements so often enumerated, roused by them and rousing them in turn. This is the distinction Poe had in mind when he called the poetic principle "an elevating excitement of the *soul*," in contradistinction to mere "passion, which is the excitement of the *heart*." On the other hand, intensity must be capable of illustration in classical and realistic poetry as well as romantic, if our view of its essential nature be correct. But we must not expect it to appear in precisely the same way, since it will be modified by the predominant quality with which it is associated. In classical art, it will naturally be less exuberant, more restrained,

but not of necessity weaker. The passages already cited from *Samson Agonistes* illustrate this point, and that poem contains many more. *Paradise Lost* opens with the conventional invocation of the classical epic, yet the first paragraph rises by this quality of intensity to a splendid poetical pitch:

> And chiefly Thou, O Spirit! that dost prefer
> Before all temples th' upright heart and pure,
> Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
> Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
> Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss
> And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark
> Illumine, what is low raise and support;
> That to the highth of this great argument
> I may assert Eternal Providence,
> And justify the ways of God to men.

Here at once the poet's exhilaration with the prospect of his colossal task and with his superb confidence in his power to accomplish it by the Divine aid, seizes the reader also, and "rouses, frees, dilates" as no verse without intensity can do. And throughout the twelve long books of the epic, while the flagging of the attention that most readers confess to is at times due to the reasoning and abstract element attaining an excessive predominance over the other elements, it is, perhaps, oftener due to a letting down of the "elevating ex-

citement of the soul," a relaxing in the poet's own mood of the intensity which ever and anon blazes up again, and is as evident as anywhere in the restrained but profoundly moving close:

> The world was all before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
> They hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow,
> Through Eden took their solitary way.

A still more illuminating instance is to be found in the same poet's *Lycidas*. This elegy, despite the fact of its depreciation by the neoclassical critics of the eighteenth century, is an admirable example of truly classical art, in its structure and technic, and in its restraint, as well as in its reverence for traditional form. The two most vital passages in the poem, however, are digressions: one on fame, the other on the degradation of the English Church; and in spite of the exquisite beauty of the flower passage, and the unsurpassed skill in rhythm which the elegy exhibits throughout, these digressions rise by virtue of their greater intensity to another level, and seize the reader with a far firmer grasp.

One more example in poetry of a classical type may be given. Arnold's *Sohrab and Rus-*

tum is a somewhat deliberate imitation of Homeric narrative; and however far short of its model it may fall in point of spontaneity, it must be granted that it possesses no small degree of classical beauty. The passages in this poem which move one most and cling to the memory longest are not the crises of the action, the duel of the heroes or the dramatic scene of recognition, for Arnold's temperament was not such as to be really awakened by these things; but the occasional pictures of quiet beauty occurring, often in similes, throughout the poem, and especially exemplified by the landscape at the close:

> But the majestic river floated on,
> Out of the mist and hum of that low land,
> Into the frosty starlight, and there moved,
> Rejoicing, through the hush'd Chorasmian waste,
> Under the solitary moon; — he flow'd
> Right for the polar star, past Orgunjè,
> Brimming, and bright, and large; then sands begin
> To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,
> And split his currents; that for many a league
> The shorn and parcell'd Oxus strains along
> Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles —
> Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had,
> In his high mountain-cradle in Pamere,
> A foil'd circuitous wanderer — till at last
> The long'd-for dash of waves is heard, and wide
> His luminous home of waters opens, bright
> And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed stars
> Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.

These lines with their exquisite and appropriate movement suffer no disturbance to their form from the feeling which they convey, yet to the poet, as to the sympathic reader, one is sure that they brought a quickening of the pulse that indicated a more intense realization of his creation than the clash of arms in the formal climax of the action.

So much for intensity in poetry of the classical type. We have examined enough to assure us that here, though less readily and less palpably than in romantic poetry, it reaches the point of producing the fine ecstasy according as it possesses intensity. These illustrations have not been drawn from the neo-classic period; but the passage on Atticus already quoted from Pope will serve to remind us that in him also intensity was by no means lacking. In fact intensity, especially in the satire of Pope, is more common than poetry, because of a scarcity of certain qualities which has been already remarked; for spite, however intense, will hardly give us poetry if it is accompanied merely by brilliant technical skill. Yet the Augustans sometimes put soul into their very technic: clearness and polish were themselves in some sort an ideal, and they, like

stylists in other days, contended "for the shade of a word" with a zeal which went far to lift from them the reproach of being mere laborers with the file. No one has appreciated what they accomplished in this way better than Mr Austin Dobson, and this part of the discussion may well close with some lines from his *Dialogue to the Memory of Mr. Alexander Pope*, which themselves exemplify what they praise:

> Suppose you say your Worst of Pope, declare
> His Jewels Paste, his Nature a Parterre,
> His Art but Artifice — I ask once more
> Where have you seen such Artifice before?
> Where have you seen a Parterre better grac'd,
> Or gems that glitter like his Gems of Paste?
> Where can you show, among your Names of Note,
> So much to copy and so much to quote?
> And where, in fine, in all our English Verse,
> A Style more trenchant and a Sense more terse?
>
> So I, that love the old Augustan Days
> Of formal Courtesies and formal Phrase;
> That like along the finish'd Line to feel
> The Ruffle's Flutter and the Flash of Steel;
> That like my Couplet as compact as clear;
> That like my Satire sparkling tho' severe,
> Unmix'd with Bathos and unmarr'd by Trope,
> I fling my Cap for Polish — and for Pope!

Here the modern imitator rises from parody to poetry — because his theme mattered to him so much.

IV

In the domain of realistic poetry we might again illustrate the presence of intensity by the examples of successful realism quoted in a previous chapter. Others are easily called to mind. In the field of satire, which I have just touched, one can see that the intensity of antipathy often serves to raise what would otherwise be a prosaic expression of dislike or disgust to a point where the warmth becomes contagious, and the reader also is fired by indignation. In descriptive poetry, the intensity seems to spring from the incisiveness and profundity of the impression made on the poet's senses; and, on the reader's side, to depend on the transference to him, through vivid expression, of an image characterized by the same qualities. Note these two stanzas from Wordsworth:

> There was a roaring in the wind all night;
> The rain came heavily and fell in floods;
> But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
> The birds are singing in the distant woods;
> Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;
> The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters;
> And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters.
>
> All things that love the sun are out of doors;
> The sky rejoices in the morning's birth;

The grass is bright with rain-drops ; — on the moors
The hare is running races in her mirth ;
And with her feet she from the plashy earth
Raises a mist ; that, glittering in the sun,
Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

With the exception of one line these stanzas are a series of almost literal observations of natural phenomena. They combine to give a general impression of the atmosphere of freshness and clarity on a bright morning after rain; but this general impression also is the outcome of faithful observation. Yet the passage is far from a mere list: it moves us as no mere list of facts could possibly do, because it contains, in addition to its literal truth, the element of intensity.

A different aspect of nature is no less vividly presented to us in the opening lines of *The Eve of St. Agnes:*

St. Agnes' Eve — Ah, bitter chill it was !
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold :
Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censer old,
Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

The attack upon our senses in these lines is so violent that it is hard to read them without

shivering, and this is made possible by the energy of the poet's realization of the physical facts which he enumerates. The presence of this passage at the beginning of a highly romantic narrative reminds us of how a poet like Keats can make his sense of fact subserve his imagination; for it is through his unsurpassed power of combining these two elements, without diminution of the intensity of either, that he conveys into this romantic poem that powerful sensuous element which gives it warmth and life and interest, in spite of the unreality of the tale which appears when it is coldly regarded by the critical judgment.

But it is not only in scenes of natural beauty or in the producing of exquisite sensation that intensity in realistic description is to be found. Perhaps the most amazing instance in our literature is in Burns's *Jolly Beggars*, a poem whose subject is a picture of the most degraded class of human beings, engaged in a debauch of drunkenness and the foulest sensual indulgence. Take one stanza:

> First, neist the fire, in auld red rags
> Ane sat, weel brac'd wi' mealy bags
> And knapsack a' in order;
> His doxy lay within his arm;

Wi' usquebae an' blankets warm
She blinket on her sodger.
An' aye he gies the touzie drab
The tither skelpin kiss,
While she held up her greedy gab,
Just like an aumous dish ;
Ilk smack still did crack still,
Like onie cadger's whup ;
Then swaggering an' staggering
He roar'd this ditty up. —

Something of the squalor and sordidness of the scene may be gathered from this short specimen: enough to remind us that whatever exhilarating effect it may have on us is not attained by the suppression of any detail, however noisome. But an extract cannot convey the astounding effect of the piece as a whole, its boisterous hilarity, its prodigious vitality, its expression of the sheer joy of life (all the more wonderful because the life seems to us of such unmitigated ugliness), its triumph of spirit over matter, — very high spirits over very dirty matter. The difference between the rousing effect of Burns's cantata, and the depression that would weigh us down on reading the description of a similar scene by a French or Russian realist,[1] lies not in any less degree of faithfulness to the fact on the part of the

[1] Compare, for example, Gorky's *Night Asylum*.

Scottish poet, but in his greater insight and sympathy, in his penetrating beyond the external fact to the hearts of those people, and, in defiance of morals and convention, telling the whole truth. And this revelation is made possible by the intensity of his vision.

There is a further element to be noted in considering the causes of the thrill which the reader receives from the faithful record of vivid impressions, the element of recognition. To know that another has observed a detail in inanimate or human nature which we had noted for ourselves, to have brought into the foreground of our consciousness a phenomenon which we had been only half aware of before, to have this half-conscious impression stamped clearly by the incisive epithet or the apt simile, to have an old recollection freshened into a living possession, — all these things belong to the pleasures afforded by realistic intensity. One cannot do better in treating this natural zest in accurate observation and clean-cut description than recall the familiar passage in our literature which illustrates this point. In the famous fourth chapter of *Cranford*, Mr. Holbrook " walked before me, with a stooping gait, his hands clasped behind him; and, as

some tree or cloud, or glimpse of distant upland pastures, struck him, he quoted poetry to himself, saying it out loud in a grand, sonorous voice, with just the emphasis that true feeling and appreciation give. We came upon an old cedar-tree, which stood at one end of the house —

'The cedar spreads his dark-green layers of shade.'

'Capital term — layers! — Wonderful man! . . . Why, when I saw the review of his poems in *Blackwood*, I set off within an hour, and walked seven miles to Misselton (for the horses were not in the way) and ordered them. Now, what colour are ash-buds in March?'

"Is the man going mad? thought I. He is very like Don Quixote. 'What colour are they, I say?' repeated he vehemently. 'I am sure I don't know, sir,' said I, with the meekness of ignorance.

"'I knew you didn't. No more did I — an old fool that I am! — till this young man comes and tells me. Black as ash-buds in March. And I've lived all my life in the country; more shame for me not to know. Black: they are jet-black, madam.'"

Mr. Holbrook's appreciative criticism helps us to realize to how large an extent the promise

of the early work of Tennyson lay in the evidence it gave of his keen delight in the observation of nature, and in the vividness and faithfulness of the language in which he recorded its appearances.

V

I suppose that no general treatment of the subject of poetry in recent times has had so powerful an influence as Matthew Arnold's essay on the *Study of Poetry*. I am far from wishing to depreciate this admirable and persuasive document: its position in English criticism is assured. But many discerning readers have found it in some respects less than completely satisfactory, and an examination of it at this point will perhaps enable us to see the cause of some of its defects, will afford a check to our own speculations, and will, perhaps, confirm us in our view of the place to be given to the quality under discussion in the present chapter.

Arnold, it is true, deprecates our present task altogether. "Critics," he says, "give themselves great labor to draw out what in the abstract constitutes the characters of a high quality of poetry. It is much better simply

to have recourse to concrete examples." And exquisitely chosen examples he accordingly gives; but he proceeds nevertheless to the drawing out of abstract characteristics. In his famous definition of poetry "as a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty," and in the elaboration of this definition in subsequent paragraphs, we find without difficulty elements corresponding to some of those which we have discussed. In his "truth in matter and substance" and "superiority in style and manner," we recognize at once the qualities we have noted as characterizing the realistic and classical tendencies respectively. But when we search for a recognition of the imaginative element, we have to be content to find it implied in the adjective *poetic* in such phrases as "high *poetic* truth of style," "*poetic* truth of substance." This absence of the explicit acknowledgment of imagination as an essential element, this begging of the question by including the term *poetic* in a definition of poetry, is a main flaw in his whole discussion.

A difficulty that has impressed readers still more lies in his decision that Chaucer and

Burns are not among the great classics, the word "classic" being here used, of course, without reference to a particular tendency, but merely as "belonging to the class of the best" — a class to which he admits the poet Gray. If this class had been confined to the four poets from whom he quotes his touchstones, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton, we might be inclined to agree, though not necessarily for his reasons; but when the gates are opened to Gray, and for a moment to Villon, and shut not only upon Dryden and Pope, but upon Chaucer and Burns, we are moved to protest.

The explanation of this peculiar judgment is to be found in the importance attached by Arnold to the quality which, following Aristotle, he calls "high seriousness." This, it seems, is the final criterion of a great poet. One might suggest it as a more fit criterion for a great divine. We have nothing against "high seriousness" as a quality in itself: the difficulty is that there is in it nothing that has to do particularly with poetry as such. One could argue that both Chaucer and Burns could be shown not to be so devoid of this quality as Arnold assumes. Take Arnold's own

method of proof by fragments and consider two lines already quoted from Burns:

> The wan Moon is setting behind the white wave,
> And Time is setting with me, oh!

or the great passage from Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, spoken by the old man who cannot die:

> This oldė man gan looke in his visage,
> And seydė thus: "For I ne kan nat fynde
> A man, though that I walked into Inde,
> Neither in citee, ne in no village,
> That woldė chaunge his youthė for myn age;
> And therfor moot I han myn agė stille,
> As longė tyme as it is Goddės wille.
> Ne Deeth, allas! ne wol nat han my lyf;
> Thus walke I, lyk a restėlees kaityf,
> And on the ground, which is my moodres gate,
> I knokkė with my staf, erly and late,
> And seyė, 'Leevė Mooder, leet me in!'"

But this is aside from our point. The element for which Arnold was groping when he seized on the σπουδή of Aristotle was not seriousness but intensity. All his test passages exhibit this quality, and in such an instance as the fragment of sleep from *Henry IV*,

> Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
> Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
> In cradle of the rude imperious surge —

the intensity of the imaginative conception, still further heightened by the swelling splen-

dor of the rhythm, is much more notable, and much more contributory to the poetic effect, than the seriousness. A substitution of this element would resolve also incidental difficulties like that raised when Arnold praises *The Jolly Beggars* as a "splendid and puissant production," but, because it has not high seriousness, has, presumably, to exclude it from great poetry. It would have enabled him, too, to appreciate at its true value such an expression of the joy of living as Chaucer puts into the mouth of the Wife of Bath:

> But, Lord Crist! whan that it remembreth me
> Upon my youthe, and on my jolitee,
> It tikleth me aboute myn hertė roote!
> Unto this day it dooth myn hertė boote
> That I have had my world, as in my tyme.
> But Age, allas! that al wole envenyme,
> Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith, —
> Lat go, fare wel, the devel go therwith!
> The flour is goon, there is namoore to telle,
> The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle;
> But yet to be right myrie wol I fonde
> Now wol I tellen of my fourthe housbonde.
> (*Prologue of the Wife of Bath's Tale*, 469–480.)

The positive quality of such a passage as this, its vividness, its zest, its penetration to the very marrow of life, and the informing of every phrase and accent with vital energy,

have much more to do with the production of a highly exalted poetic enjoyment than seriousness of treatment or theme.

But this term led the critic astray in his inclusions as well as his exclusions. Thomas Gray is a justly honored name in the annals of English literature, and he has contributed at least one poem to the permanent body of household poetry. *An Elegy in a Country Churchyard* is an exquisite versifying of thoughts about human life and destiny that are within the reach of every one's understanding, and are corroborated by every one's experience. It is sufficiently concrete, has sufficient touch with reality on the one hand, and it soars gently on the wings of a not too daring imagination on the other, to give it balance; but its preeminent qualities are those of fitness and beauty of form. In spite of the pervading mild melancholy of its atmosphere, it is not highly subjective; it is a sound piece of classical art. It stands out in its period, not because its classicism is overshadowed by romantic elements, but because it has enough imagination to make it better balanced than the mass of the verse of the mid-eighteenth century, not enough to tip the scale on the romantic side. Yet, with

all its admirable qualities, the *Elegy* is a little, not a great, masterpiece, and Gray only a little master, not in the class of Shakespeare and Chaucer and Burns. He was too much lacking in temperament, in vital energy, to give that high degree of intensity needed for really great poetry; and this Arnold himself unconsciously recognizes when he uses, as the refrain of his sympathetic essay on Gray, the words, "He never spoke out."

This consideration of Gray suggests a clue to some other puzzling judgments in current criticism. When one returns to the poetry of Landor, and notes the exquisite truth of his observation, the charm of his imagination, the classical beauty of his form, one is often tempted to claim for him a place almost with the greatest masters. Yet he remains in the background, more ignored by the general reader, except for a few pieces in the anthologies, than any man near him in rank. And reflection shows that this is not without cause. In spite of the fieriness of Landor's temper in social relations, of the almost tremendous intensity of his pride, his scorn, his courage, and his sensitiveness as a man, he somehow fails to project this intensity into his writings.

It is there at times in a high degree, as in *Rose Aylmer;* it is there usually in some degree; but in the great mass of his work it appears in only a comparatively low degree, with a resultant weakness in the hold which it takes upon the reader. He is often coldly beautiful; he forces us to admire his clear images, his noble and delicate cadences; only occasionally does he kindle us to exhilaration, almost never does he reach the white heat of ecstasy. Even his beautiful Hellenics have the limitation that leads Symons to compare them to exquisite reliefs, not to statues in the round.

VI

In conclusion, we may note shortly the connection between intensity and rhythm. The tendency of human speech under the influence of high emotion to fall into rhythmical cadence has been often remarked, and students of the origin of metre have not failed to take account of this tendency as bearing on their problem. On the other side, every reader can bear witness to the effect of rhythm in reinforcing the moving effect of the content of literature. Here, as in the earlier part of the present dis-

cussion, then, it seems unnecessary to treat separately the two points of view of writer and reader, since in the matter of feeling in poetry the difference is usually in degree rather than in kind. Certainly it seems true of both, that, in the expression of poetic ideas, metre is an intensifying medium of the highest importance.

Its effect is most obvious in the cases where it is simply imitative of the sound or the action described by the words; and here it may almost equal the words in its share in producing the impression. In such a poem as that of Browning's beginning,

> I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
> I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three —

we come close to the actual reproduction of the sound, and really reach the reproduction of the *tempo*. The degree to which we enter into the spirit of this wild ride is clearly due in great measure to this all but actual hearing of the clatter of hoofs. Only slightly less self-evident are the cases where the effect of the rhythm is suggestive rather than imitative; and there are many cases where the line between these is hard to draw. This is so in Tennyson's Bugle Song:

> The splendour falls on castle walls
> And snowy summits old in story;
> The long light shakes across the lakes,
> And the wild cataract leaps in glory;
> Blow bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
> Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

The imitative element here is, of course, not confined to the metre; the choice and arrangement of the sounds, both vowels and consonants, coöperate powerfully: but in addition to the imitative value, the rhythm suggests a variety of sensuous impressions besides those of sound and motion. The power of rhythm extends, too, beyond the evoking of sensuous imagery and has the capacity of suggesting moods. The extraordinary placidity of *Crossing the Bar* is to a large extent due to the fine agreement of rhythm and idea, though there is little direct imitation; and Tennyson's work everywhere abounds with illustrations of the same device.

But the function of metre as a means of raising the pitch of intensity in a poem is not limited to these well-recognized methods of imitation and suggestion. It has a further power, exercised at times in almost complete detachment from the particular ideas of the poem, by which it prepares the way for the

effect to be produced by the substance of the poem and by the other elements of form, through inducing a general excitement that results in a high state of receptiveness to emotional suggestion. It performs psychologically a function comparable to the exhilarating effect of marching in concert with others, quickening the circulation, and increasing the responsiveness of the sensitive centres.

Of all the elements and devices of poetry, rhythm is that which appeals most forcibly and immediately to the crowd, for the same reason that, of all kinds of music, melody with well-marked rhythm is surest of popularity. There is a point, indeed, where it is difficult to distinguish the pleasures derived from verse and music respectively. Listen to the sound here:

> Go button your boots with a tiger's tail,
> Comb down your golden hair;
> And live for a week upon bubble-and-squeak
> On the steps of a winding stair.

This is sheer nonsense, but it is not without emotional effect: as art, I suppose it is on about the same level as the rhythmical beating of a drum. The emotional condition produced by sheer rhythm like this is vague, and in a real poem receives direction from the substance.

But, though vague, it is not absolutely characterless; and poets vary greatly in their tact in fitting the proper content to the right metrical movement. Tennyson was nearly always right here; Wordsworth often wrong. A flagrant instance is his pathetic poem of *The Reverie of Poor Susan:*

At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears,
Hangs a Thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three years:
Poor Susan has passed by the spot, and has heard
In the silence of morning the song of the Bird.

He proceeds with a tenderly drawn picture of homesickness, but the sentiment of the country girl in the city longing for her home is made to keep time to a rhythm that is next cousin to that used so admirably in *How They brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix.*

This evidence of specific quality in rhythms, however, does not contradict the view of the general kindling effect of metre, its power of preparing the reader to realize the content of the poem more intensely, as heat prepares wax to take more readily and more deeply the impression of the seal.

With all this, it must be remembered that rhythm is only one of many aids to the ex-

pression of intensity. This fundamental quality allies itself intimately with any or all of the other essential qualities, heightening and strengthening them, and determining as much as any the poetic vitality of the work in which they are manifested.

Yet the addition of this element to any one of the others does not do away with the necessity for the balance of the other fundamental qualities. It is possible to have imaginative intensity in such excess and such isolation as to produce mere incoherence, unrestrained by reason or reality. That one can find abundantly exemplified in William Blake, and sometimes in Shelley, though Shelley's sense of form usually added some element of control. Intense realism we have found in Crabbe and Wordsworth, as one could find it also in Burns and Byron and many others, where the fury of the zeal for exposing the fact does not serve to raise the result into the realm of poetry. The doubtful standing of Satire in the field of poetry is due to the possibility of this situation. And the age of Pope affords ample evidence of the zealous cultivation of the power of expressing good sense in good form, without much resulting poetry.

On the other hand, the presence of intensity does much to produce the necessary balance. This is especially so in the cases where otherwise there might be an excess of the rational or matter-of-fact elements, because the tendency of emotion is to awaken imagination and so modify an exclusive attention to the literal truth or severe premeditation by the admixture of that heightening and idealization which feeling is prone to produce.

It appears, then, that though intensity is necessary in all types of poetry in order to produce the "elevating excitement of the soul," the ecstasy in which for an instant we see things *sub specie æternitatis;* and though it is a main force in producing the required equilibrium among the other elements, the fire that melts and fuses them; it is nevertheless peculiarly related to the imagination, rousing it and being roused by it with an intimacy of action and reaction found in connection with none of the other elements; and affording an explanation of the fact, often denied by the critics, but recognized by the general sense of the public, that in romantic verse more constantly than in any other kind are we likely to find burning the true poetic fire.

CHAPTER VII

SENTIMENTALISM IN POETRY

In the foregoing chapters we have been concerned with those elements of poetry which may be regarded as fundamental, and which seem to be present, though in varying proportions, in all poetry. In those which remain, we are to discuss the nature and relations of what we may call the minor qualities of sentiment and humor. Looked at from the point of view of poems in which they are prominently manifested, such elements are, of course, not minor, but may be the most striking characteristics: but from the point of view of poetry in general they are minor, since great poetry may exist without them.

I

The word "sentiment" is employed in a considerable variety of senses; but in connection with literature and art it has a fairly definite meaning. It is used for the milder range of emotions, for emotion associated with thought and evoked by ideas, as opposed to

passion and to emotion more directly dependent on sensation. It constantly appears in connection with the adjective "tender"; and is the mainstay of the pathetic. So frequent is this association that sentiment is at times almost identified with the feeling of compassion; but such feelings as friendship, the love of home and country, the sense of honor, a kindly attitude towards the lower animals, with the other emotions generally called "humanitarian," — all of these, when they do not exist with such intensity as to be called passion, are all included in sentiment. As an element in character the sentiments play a very important part; for, though they are not likely to be involved in the great crises of existence, they are in daily exercise, and are largely the causes of the prevailing tone of our ordinary life. The factors, for example, which are usually considered in the awarding of the title of "gentleman" belong chiefly to the class of what used to be called "fine feelings" or sentiments.

In literature, the effect of sentiment is somewhat analogous. It does not make or unmake poetry, but it may be chiefly responsible for its flavor and charm. A poem like *The Cotter's Saturday Night* has gained its great popu-

larity mainly by the diffusion throughout it of those sentiments with which the ordinary man most readily sympathizes: the feeling of domesticity; the attraction of fireside and children at the end of the day's work; the mild reciprocal inclination of the man to the maid and the maid to the man, love in the stage when it may be still impeded by bashfulness; the family exercise of religion, here affecting the reader through old association rather than conviction; and, finally, the emotion of patriotism. While the great masterpieces deal with lofty passions, supreme crises, and heroic types, the function of sentiment, both in life and in literature, is the enrichment of the commonplace; and this, not by the larger exercise of imagination that discerns in it the universal, but by a humbler process of rousing tender feelings of sympathy and association. The abundance of this quality, along with a fine command of simple rhythms, is the main cause of the wide popular appeal of such a poet as Longfellow.

II

But our main theme is not sentiment, but sentimentalism, a tendency closely related, in-

deed, to sentiment, but differing widely from it in its manifestations and effects. Sentimentalism, like the other tendencies in human nature and in literature which we have been studying, is the exclusive property of no one period or movement; yet the historical method is as convenient an approach as any to an apprehension of its significance.

Alongside of the rationalism which we have noted as so prevalent in the eighteenth century, there appeared a vigorous assertion of the rights of feeling. No society and no literature could long subsist on a purely intellectual diet, and a demand for an outlet on the emotional side of human nature was inevitable. Evidences of it are abundant in the social life of the time, in philosophy, and in literature, and it found its culminating expression in the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau's influence gave the tendency an enormous impetus, and for a generation or more it drenched the literature of Western Europe, coinciding in time to a large extent with the revival of Romanticism, and becoming mixed with it in a confusion which criticism has not yet disentangled.

In England, however, the assertion of the

rights of feeling had been going on long before Rousseau, and had given rise to well-marked literary forms, the most noted of which were the sentimental drama and the sentimental novel. Each of these forms exhibits the sentimental tendency under a special phase; but before examining them it is necessary to consider the thing itself as an element in human nature.

In spite of the fact that many of the sentiments enumerated are, like the sentiment of pity, roused by the spectacle of suffering and misfortune, and though sentiment, even when no suffering is involved, is peculiarly allied to tears, yet the sentiments as a whole are sources of pleasing experience. Even in the normal and wholesome person, the sadness of sentiment is a pleasing melancholy. It is in this "pleasing" that the insidious element in sentiment resides; and when a man, led by this pleasure, goes on to cultivate the feelings which give rise to it, for the sake of intensifying and prolonging the pleasure, we behold the development of sentiment into sentimentalism. Sentimentalism is the cultivation of emotion for the sake of the thrill, of the subjective experience. It is distinguished from

sentiment, which is spontaneous and innocuous, because the pleasure the latter affords comes unsought, and is the result of the normal reaction of a sensitive temperament to a situation. It is similarly distinguished from passion and the more intense forms of genuine emotion, for these also are spontaneous and unforced. Further, while real passion seeks its natural outlet in action, the sentimentalist is characterized by the fact that his interest in the object of his worked-up emotion ceases when it has served its purpose of providing the desired excitement. Not that the sentimentalist abstains entirely from action: the pauperizing effects of sentimental charity are proof to the contrary. But the real motive, conscious or unconscious, of the sentimental giving of alms is not the good of the beggar but the giver's flush of satisfaction from the picture of himself as Benevolence relieving Misery. For this type of person finds that the emotional luxury is intensified, not so much by absorption in the drama of life, as by the power of being at once spectator and actor. He loves to see himself in interesting and picturesque situations, and he will indulge himself in this pleasure, even when he could by a

slight intellectual effort see that he is degrading himself. Hence comes the phenomenon that the sentimental author is constantly posing and attitudinizing, and that his work stands condemned for insincerity. For, in order to get the thrill out of the situation, he has to deceive himself as to its factitious nature, and where the corrective would be a candid employment of the reason, he seduces the imagination into coöperation in procuring for him this sterile enjoyment of his own sensibilities. A sincere and candid critical view of himself thus engaged would reveal the incongruity of the situation, and the sentimentalism would be dissolved in laughter. Hence this tendency has always an insincere element in it, and in general keeps humor at arm's length.

III

No writer has ever more keenly penetrated the humbug of sentimentalism, or more trenchantly exposed its fundamental selfishness than Shakespeare. Figures exhibiting its workings abound in his plays. Romeo in love with Rosaline, seeking not his mistress's welfare or even her society, but solitude, where he may

nurse his emotion and enjoy his imagined misery, is a clear example; and it is brought into clear relief by contrast with the Romeo who loves Juliet with a genuine passion, and with open eyes risks and meets death itself for her sake. Constance, in *King John*, sacrificing the political prospects of her son in her eagerness to indulge in voluble eloquence her grief over that son's wrongs, till King Philip impatiently exclaims, "You are more fond of grief than of your child," — this Constance is another instance. Richard II is a still more elaborately drawn specimen of the type. Landing in Wales, he finds his throne threatened by the invading Bolingbroke, and first he falls back on his favorite view of himself:

> Not all the water in the rough rude sea
> Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;
> The breath of worldly men cannot depose
> The deputy elected by the Lord.
>
> (*Richard II*, III, ii, 54 ff.)

But Bolingbroke presses on till the danger cannot be ignored, and then Richard finds his satisfaction, not in leading a forlorn hope, but in indulging in a depression as unreasonable, but just as enjoyable, as his former assurance:

> Of comfort no man speak.
> Let 's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs ;
> Make dust our paper and with rainy eyes
> Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth. . . .
> For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
> And tell sad stories of the death of kings.
>
> (III, ii, 144 ff.)

Even in the humiliation of the abdication scene, he wallows luxuriously in the sense of his own debasement, and prolongs the agony for no purpose but the enjoyment of the picturesque misery of his fall. Once more, Duke Orsino, in *Twelfth Night*, exhibits with fatal clearness the two main aspects of sentimentalism. The first is in the opening speech :

> If music be the food of love, play on !
> Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
> The appetite may sicken, and so die.
> That strain again ! It had a dying fall.
> O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,
> Stealing and giving odour. Enough ! no more !
> 'T is not so sweet now as it was before.

Here, surely, is an explicit picture of the sentimental as opposed to the real lover, lying among flowers, listening to music with a dying fall, nursing his sickly passion into an anæmic existence, and sending a proxy to do his wooing. Orsino is in love with love, not with Olivia. Then at the end, when Olivia definitely

rejects him, the other side of sentimentalism appears:

> Why should I not, had I the heart to do it,
> Like to the Egyptian thief at point of death,
> Kill what I love? — a savage jealousy
> That sometimes savours nobly.
>
> (v, i, 120 ff.)

Here imagination is brought to his aid, and he contemplates with interest the image of himself as the jealous murderer of the woman he thought he loved.

These examples from Shakespeare are brought together, not as part of a historical treatment of the sentimental tendency in literature — for such exposures as these indicate the reverse of sentimentalism in the author — but as concrete instances which may help to make more definite the notion of sentimentalism contained in the abstract description. We return now to the historical consideration of the tendency in the sentimental literature of the eighteenth century.

IV

Among the speculations on man and society that abounded in that era, sentimentalism seized on the congenial theory of the essential goodness of the human heart. The view that

the criminal was at bottom a good fellow, who had been led astray by the force of circumstances and who consequently was to be pitied rather than blamed, appealed then as now to temperaments eager to enjoy the sentiments of compassion and universal benevolence. The sentimental drama sprang up, a type of play which presented middle-class or humble life by a method externally realistic, and in which the action centred in an erring son or daughter, husband or wife, whose sins and whose sufferings, repentance and forgiveness, served equally to provide the luxury of gushing tears. The intensity of *passion* of any sort seldom appears here; the "melting mood" is the appropriate outcome for this kind of feeling. From England, as Bernbaum has shown, the sentimental drama passed to France; and the *comédie larmoyante*, and the sentimental journey and autobiography which imitated Sterne, were among the most notable contributions of English to Continental literature in the eighteenth century.

The theory of the essential goodness of human nature did more than provide an easy channel for the runnings of sentimental sympathy. It softened the sentimentalist's heart to-

wards himself as well as towards other victims of environment, and, along with an excessive development of the doctrine of the rights of feeling, it tended to the weakening of moral judgments, and to the substitution of a tender sensibility for common sense and a clear conscience as the guide of life and the criterion of character. Later the fervid eloquence of Rousseau proclaimed these doctrines as a new gospel, and for half a century one hears their echoes in theories of education and government, in novel and lyric and romance.

The manifestation of this tendency in the novel lies outside of our field ; but a glance at one or two writers will help the completeness of our view. Samuel Richardson was too great an artist to compose his novels on a recipe so simple as served for the sentimental drama. Life as he understood it was a complex thing, and exhibited a great variety of character and emotion. Yet it was undoubtedly the same craving as found satisfaction in the lachrymose drama that gave Richardson his eager audience, and held London palpitating and sobbing for weeks over the fate of Clarissa. It is a difficult question to what extent the writers of sentimental books in this period were themselves

sentimentalists, or were merely deliberate devisers of characters and situations designed to draw tears from the reader; but it appears likely that Richardson shared to some degree his public's sensibility, and had some part in the painful pleasure roused by the pathos of his heroine's prolonged demise. The same problem faces one in the case of even more abandoned caterers to the sentimental taste, like the author of *The Man of Feeling*, who complicates the matter still further by pointing out the evils of excessive sensibility while creating scenes and persons which seem deliberately calculated to excite it. Still more perplexing is the literary character of Laurence Sterne. It is often said that all that sentiment needs to keep it from degenerating into sentimentalism is the saving grace of humor. Yet Sterne is, both in his character and in his work, a pronounced sentimentalist, while at the same time he is a great humorist. In some writers, Dickens for example, this combination is accounted for by an alternation of moods: one scene is written in one mood, another in the other. But in Sterne they come to closer quarters, in the same scene, the same paragraph, the same sentence even. This man had

the power of coaxing the tears out of a situation, and next moment of laughing at its absurdity, without being in the least ashamed of himself, or at all reluctant to resume the sentimental attitude forthwith. No sentimentalist was ever so open and unashamed in his frank profession of the quest for the sentimental occasion and the sentimental experience; none so sophisticated in contriving refinements of his favorite dissipation. The humor which, in a simpler temperament, would check by exposure the rise of factitious feeling, served in Sterne only to excite it by tantalizing; and left him free to use even prurience in its service. Nowhere in the poetry of this or any other period are we likely to find the deliberate abuse of sentiment carried to the extreme in which it is found in the writings of Laurence Sterne.

V

In the eighteenth century the sentimental movement affected non-dramatic poetry later and at first much less obviously than it did the drama and the novel. The frigid attempts at lyric that appeared during the neo-classical supremacy in England contain evidence enough

of attempts to work up feeling that certainly did not spring forth spontaneously; but these attempts are as a rule so unsuccessful that one cannot believe that either writer or reader was really touched, as the sentimentalist yearns to be touched. Honest sentiment without pretence at profundity, but sincere as far as it went, one finds, indeed, in the society verses of Prior, in popular songs like Gay's *Black-eyed Susan*, Carey's *Sally in our Alley*, or Dibdin's *Tom Bowling;* and a tenderer strain in the Scottish poets, who were much less affected by neo-classicism than their southern brethren, — Allan Ramsay, Grizel Baillie, and the authors of such familiar songs as *The Flowers of the Forest*, *The Braes of Yarrow*, and *Auld Robin Gray;* but most of the poetry of this class rings sincere, and needs to be mentioned in this discussion only to be distinguished from the product of the rising tide of sensibility.

One document, notorious enough in its day, and usually claimed as a prominent evidence of the revival of romanticism, gives rise to a nice question in criticism. Macpherson's *Ossian* has, indeed, externally many of the marks of a romantic production. Realistic it is not;

classic it is not; for one cannot find in it either sense of fact or form. Vague and tumultuous, this production appealed to many readers, on the Continent as well as in Britain, as a highly imaginative work, presenting ideal passion against a background of mist and mountain,— the very embodiment of romance. The soberer criticism of our time has its doubts about Ossian, doubts that go deeper than the historical questions of its age and authorship. Some find that its characters are but names, not people; that its landscape defies visualization; that its supposed imagination is a humbug and a fraud. This is, perhaps, a trifle severe; but it is at least fairly to be argued that Macpherson's conceptions did not really rouse in their author powerful emotion, but rather came into existence as the result of a violent effort to produce something impressive and thrilling; and that they found a responsive audience because so much of the public at that time stood eager to be thrilled. Thus interpreted, the vogue of Ossian would appear as the result of a conspiracy, unconscious on the side of the public, and perhaps on both sides, to regard as a masterpiece a pretentious impostor, whose very pretentiousness was the chief factor in making possible a

kind of self-hypnotism. If this is right, Ossian was the first notable non-dramatic triumph of the sentimentalist movement in English poetry in that age.

Among the beneficent results of the vogue of sensibility in the period under discussion was the rise of the humanitarian movement. Its effects upon society were very great: prison-reform and the abolition of slavery were only two of the most important results; but the current of sentiment which has produced down to our own time Societies for the Prevention of various cruelties, and for the protection and preservation of people and animals not able to protect themselves, has its source in the eighteenth-century revival of feeling, and has never to any notable extent ebbed since. The humanitarian poetry of the last quarter of the eighteenth century seems to be clearly a phase of the same movement. Cowper's poems about his tame hares, and Burns's poems *To a Daisy* and *To a Mouse*, to the old ewe, and to the mare, Maggie, are often brought into relation with the political side of the Romantic Movement, as if the doctrine of the rights of man and the brotherhood of man had been extended to hares and mice

and daisies, and as if plants and animals were to be given the benefit of triumphant democracy. This is to misconceive the situation. The attitude of the authors who produced these poems, the attitude of the public which welcomed them, and which still reads them gladly, is that of willingness to be moved to sympathetic compassion of the helplessness of dumb things; and is quite different from the belligerent mood of "A Man 's a Man for a' that," the indignation of Coleridge, or the early democratic optimism of Wordsworth and Southey. Here again a little care suffices to keep the sentimental and the romantic threads distinct.

In associating these poems with the flourishing of sentiment, there is not implied, of course, any condemnation of them. Of sentimentalism Cowper may in general be acquitted, sensitive soul though he was. The case of Burns is not so easily settled. The poem *To a Mouse* is touched with implicit humor, and is just saved, in spite of its moralizing conclusion. *To a Daisy* seems, it must be confessed, to come in its closing stanzas perilously near to sentimentalism, almost, if not quite, to slop over. And it is true as a rule of Burns that the

traces of sentimentalism in him are oftenest to be found in the last stanzas of poems. At times his taste and tact failed him; he did not recognize the proper stopping place, but went on, after the due culmination and after the spontaneous impulse had abated, working up a jaded emotion to what he hoped would be a final blaze of glory. Often he sought this lofty close by pure didacticism, and in so doing has often mightily pleased his countrymen, who have at large better taste in sermons than in poetry; but sometimes he sought it in a factitious intensity of feeling, and it is by virtue of such cases that we are discussing him now. Perhaps the most prominent instance of this is in the last three verses of *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, where, as if he undervalued the faithful and tender picture which he had drawn, he seeks to raise the emotional level by apostrophes to Scotia and to the Almighty.

Several of Burns's English lyrics occasioned (one cannot say inspired) by the flirtation with Mrs. McLehose, are among the worst in this respect:

> Clarinda, mistress of my soul,
> The measur'd time is run!
> The wretch beneath the dreary pole
> So marks his latest sun.

> To what dark cave of frozen night
> Shall poor Sylvander hie,
> Depriv'd of thee, his life and light,
> The sun of all his joy ?

And, indeed, except for one or two immortal lyrics, the verses that resulted from this insincere piece of philandering betray their origin in an almost total lack of that spontaneity and abandon that characterize the dialect songs celebrating his love affairs among the country girls of his own class. The test to be applied throughout is simply that of emotional sincerity. For the most part, Burns's poems and songs give the impression of feeling compelling utterance ; here and there we catch him laboring with the utterance in the effort to compel the feeling, and then he is with the sentimentalists.

The less sympathetic critics among Wordsworth's contemporaries frequently found themselves repelled by what they felt to be a sentimentalist quality in his poems. They seldom used the word, but the thing itself is often enough pointed at, as, for example, by Jeffrey when he contrasts Crabbe and Wordsworth, greatly to the latter's disadvantage. Much of this adverse criticism has rebounded on the head of the critic, for we have come to see

that it was often the critic's own narrowness of emotional range and the shallowness of his insight that led him to condemn as insincere, expressions of emotion whose springs he did not understand. Nevertheless, Jeffrey and his like were not always wrong, and he put his finger on many faults in Wordsworth which it is useless to try to defend.

When we read the manifesto issued by Wordsworth and Coleridge with the *Lyrical Ballads*, and the later elaborations of it by both poets, we are sometimes moved to wonder, and perhaps to doubt, by the apparently deliberate and calculated method by which they represent themselves as going to work to produce poetry. "Mr. Wordsworth," says Coleridge in a passage already quoted, "was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us." One prefers to think of poets as themselves in the first place excited by such feeling, and moved by its very intensity to seek utterance for it, especially when these poets

are leading a reaction against the poetry of reason. In this, as in many other respects, the authors of the *Lyrical Ballads* proved better than their word, and spontaneity of emotion appears abundantly in their verse. Yet in this carefully thought out program we may see a partial explanation of the fact that we do find in Wordsworth cases where the will and the circumstances are thoroughly prepared for the poetical experience, but no poetry results. Sometimes the outcome is a piece of somewhat barren realism, as in *The Thorn*, already cited; oftener the place of the missing emotion is taken by moralizing, to which Wordsworth was ever prone; occasionally he is betrayed into working up the feeling and produces a piece of sentimentalism. The following poem seems to me an instance:

Up, Timothy, up with your staff and away!
Not a soul in the village this morning will stay;
The hare has just started from Hamilton's grounds,
And Skiddaw is glad with the cry of the hounds.

— Of coats and of jackets grey, scarlet, and green,
On the slopes of the pastures all colours were seen;
With their comely blue aprons, and caps white as snow
The girls on the hills made a holiday show.

Fresh sprigs of green box-wood, not six months before,
Filled the funeral basin at Timothy's door;

A coffin through Timothy's threshold had past ;
One Child did it bear, and that Child was his last.

Now fast up the dell came the noise and the fray,
The horse and the horn, and the hark ! hark away !
Old Timothy took up his staff, and he shut
With a leisurely motion the door of his hut.

Perhaps to himself at that moment he said ;
" The key I must take for my Ellen is dead."
But of this in my ears not a word did he speak ;
And he went to the chase with a tear on his cheek.

This is a mild case, and thorough-going Wordsworthians will doubtless defend it. But it seems to me that in it the poet perceives an opportunity for pathos which he does not feel in any high degree, and attempts, unsuccessfully, to work himself and his reader into it in the telling. But Wordsworth was too sincere and simple-minded (in the good sense) to lay himself often open to the charge of habitual sentimentalism. The sentiment in his poems often falls flat; his imaginative vision often failed in intensity; but as a rule he contented himself with drawing the moral and letting the feeble emotion lie, without attempting to galvanize it into a semblance of vitality.

Occasional poetry of the sort Wordsworth so largely indulged in, verse suggested by the sight of moving natural occurrences, — " On

reaching the summit of a mountain at the moment of sunrise," "On my first view of the Matterhorn," and the like, is particularly liable to sentimental weakness. The circumstances and the moment seem propitious to poetry; the would-be poet sees himself as a picturesque figure enjoying a picturesque experience; and, when he puts it into verse, he insists on the symptoms of an appropriate ecstasy. The lamentable result every one has suffered from.

VI

The chief example of the sentimentalist in the Romantic period in England was Lord Byron. In his personality and in his poetry alike it is a pervasive characteristic, most marked, as is natural, in his youth, but recurring almost to the very end. In England, at least, Byron is more responsible than any other one writer for the confusion of sentimentalism and romanticism; and a clear view of the difference between these tendencies in him will do much to bring order into the general situation.

In our third chapter, in discussing imagination and romanticism, we noted several respects in which Byron's claims to be regarded

as a romantic poet are valid. The most important of these are his love for the more awe-inspiring aspects of natural scenery, his glorifying of the savage ideal, and his enthusiasm for liberty, especially the liberty of the individual soul. In all of these, he was the captive of his imagination. When we add to these a pronounced subjectivity, we name a tendency that calls for careful consideration, if we are to discriminate between the sentimental and the romantic.

It may be remembered that we admitted subjectivity to a place among the phases of romanticism, because the imagination, unlike the other faculties involved in the creation of poetry, is a purely personal thing, and, in a peculiar sense, its operation stamps a work of art with the individual impress of the author.[1] It followed that in a period or movement in which the imagination was especially active personality would also be prominent, and much of the poetry would be likely to exhibit subjective and introspective traits. But, though subjectivity may be an evidence of the activity of the imagination, it need not always be so. Imaginative activity is always largely subjective:

[1] Cf. pp. 65 ff, *ante*.

subjectivity is not always imaginative; and a man may be much concerned with himself and his own emotions without owing this preoccupation primarily to his imagination. The sentimentalist, as we have seen, is intensely interested in himself and his emotions, and is apt to choose his interests and occupations with a view to the intensifying of these emotions and the satisfaction of that self, using imagination only as a means to this end. But he is not therefore a romanticist; for imagination is his servant (his pander, I had almost said), while in romance it is his master. In all subjective verse then, if we wish to be sure whether it is romantic or sentimental, we have to discern whether the author is dealing with his inner experiences because they are the source of that light that transfigures the external world and makes Nature into art, or merely because he finds in them a thrill of self-satisfaction. To an uncommon degree is this discrimination necessary in the case of Byron. In no other English writer are these two elements so subtly intertwined; in no other is it so difficult to decide whether we are listening to the utterance of genuine agony and yearning wrung forth by a vision of the ideal intolerably wronged

and thwarted by the actual, or to the insincere and affected cry of self-torture inflicted to pamper a luxurious sensibility.

The matter is comparatively simple in most of the early poems. In his first book, a slender volume of lyrics and translations printed when he was nineteen, no fewer than thirteen of the original poems contain heart-broken farewells to young ladies who have proved hard-hearted or faithless, or have died or gone away. The following stanzas, gathered here and there in the volume, will recall the prevailing mood:

> Who can conceive, who has not proved,
> The anguish of a last embrace?
> When, torn from all you fondly loved,
> You bid a long adieu to peace.
>
> (*To Emma.*)

> Again, thou best beloved, adieu!
> Ah! if thou canst, o'ercome regret;
> Nor let thy mind past joys review, —
> Our only hope is to regret! —
>
> (*To Caroline.*)

> Oh! when, my adored, in the tomb will they place me,
> Since, in life, love and friendship for ever are fled?
> If again in the mansion of death I embrace thee,
> Perhaps they will leave unmolested the dead.
>
> (*To Caroline.*)

Calf-love is supposed to be a normal childish

ailment, no more to be taken tragically than German measles or chicken pox, but few calves are as determined as this to suck melancholy out of its frustration. Already, before nineteen, this passion-tost soul is beginning to lose zest, and we have the pathetic spectacle of a blasé calf:

> And woman, lovely woman! thou,
> My hope, my comforter, my all!
> How cold must be my bosom now,
> When e'en thy smiles begin to pall!
> (*I would I were a careless child.*)

Not only love, but friendship and the "bowl" have ceased to charm, and solitude alone attracts:

> Fain would I fly the haunts of men —
> I seek to shun, not hate mankind;
> My breast requires the sullen glen,
> Whose gloom may suit a darken'd mind.
> (*Ibid.*)

He is not merely despondent: he has passed, though as yet only temporarily, to the sentimentalist's inevitable development — cynicism. He is fain to

> Confess that woman's false as fair,
> And friends have feeling for — themselves.
> (*To Romance.*)

Nay, more, he looks back critically on his

sentimental moods, and diagnoses the disease he has suffered from:

> Romance! disgusted with deceit,
> Far from thy motley court I fly,
> Where Affectation holds her seat,
> And sickly Sensibility;
> Whose silly tears can never flow
> For any pangs excepting thine;
> Who turns aside from real woe,
> To steep in dew thy gaudy shrine.
>
> (*To Romance.*)

This lucid interval of self-criticism lasted only a moment, and Byron continued his lyrics of forced passion and affected self-pity. The lash of the reviewers, however, stung him into another mood, and in his early satires, bare of any idealistic element though they are, he appears in a more manly attitude, and displays flashes of that wit that was later to illumine his masterpiece. Then came the first cantos of *Childe Harold*. The plan of this poem, a record of travel with reflections, or rather emotional reactions, on the peoples and places visited, lies open to the criticism that it affords a constant temptation to work up the feeling when it happens not to spring up spontaneously. To this temptation Byron often enough fell a victim, especially in the first part of the poem; and its sentimental tone was increased

by his choice of a hero who reproduced precisely those characteristics of the blasé pleasure-seeker, embittered and misanthropic, which Byron cherished in himself. Yet the poet was not nearly so bad as he imagined himself, and as his pilgrimage proceeds there is not only a steady improvement in the eloquence and fluency of the versification, and in the brilliance and vivacity of the language, but more and more evidence of genuine emotion. The graves of heroes who perished in the fight for liberty, the scenes of vanished greatness, the spectacle of magnificent scenery rouse in him enthusiasm, indignation, and admiration too real to be questioned, and created not merely by the presence of the facts, but by a vivid imaginative seizure of their larger significance. Even the cheapening effect of constant repetition in the schoolbooks and anthologies cannot make his great passages so hackneyed that they fail to call forth the response due to genuine romantic poetry.

The group of romantic tales published between the second and third cantos of *Childe Harold* occupies a middle position also in the matter of the transition from sentimentalism to romanticism. As we re-read these Oriental

stories of love and hate to-day, perhaps the thing that impresses us most in them is their unreality. This does not apply to the descriptions of nature, or to the digressions upon fallen nations, for in these Byron often deserves the praise due to similar passages in *Childe Harold;* but the stories themselves are chiefly remarkable for their remoteness from life. It takes an effort to conceive how our grandfathers and grandmothers were carried away by sympathy for the raptures and the sorrows of these most theatrical Selims and Zuleikas. The romance in them lies in the situation rather than in the human nature: and the hero is not so much Byron himself, as is usually said, as he is a copy of what Byron so often chose to portray as himself, a reproduction of his favorite pose. From time to time the vigor of the narrative, the picturesqueness of the scene, the bound of the metre convince us that the poet has really entered into his conception, that imagination is in control, and that he is carried away by the romantic mood. But often, too, it is easier to think of the author as the showman, pulling the wires of his puppets, and sneering at the public whom he can so easily delude with his ventriloquism of passion.

The truth is, I imagine, between these extremes: the poems are neither quite genuine nor pure humbug, but the result of the complex temperament of a man who found pleasure in letting himself go, who submitted to an illusion which it pleased him to indulge and, at times, deliberately to create. But in these poems it is oftenest a more or less theatrical illusion, not that compelling and irresistible imaginative vision which has produced the greater romantic masterpieces.

There remain the dramas and *Don Juan*. Of the former we have here little to say: for though the limitation of Byron's imaginative range in the matter of types of human character has prevented him from becoming one of the great dramatists, yet his choice of heroes with whom he could sympathize made it possible for him to express their moods and aspirations with an impressive sincerity, and rendered unnecessary the effort to work up an emotion he did not feel. No part of his whole production is so clear of sentimentalism as his plays.

Don Juan presents the most interesting problem of all. Written between the ages of thirty and thirty-six, it not only exhibits Byron's powers in their maturity, but also in

all their variety. Sentiment and passion, wit and humor, scorn and enthusiasm, all find expression in the ever-changing moods of the poem; and nowhere are the poet's amazing cleverness, eloquence, brilliance, and dash more lavishly employed.

Though primarily a satire, *Don Juan* is rich in sentiment. The episode of Haidée, which occupies more than two cantos, is narrated with abundance of sympathy, and Byron shows genuine tenderness for his creation. And, at intervals throughout the whole book, the cynicism and the satire are dropped, and delicate and touching stanzas occur, finer in texture than the exaggerated emotions of his early work.

> Oh, Hesperus! thou bringest all good things —
> Home to the weary, to the hungry cheer,
> To the young bird the parent's brooding wings,
> The welcome stall to the o'erlabour'd steer;
> Whate'er of peace about our hearthstone clings,
> Whate'er our household gods protect of dear,
> Are gather'd round us by thy look of rest;
> Thou bring'st the child, too, to the mother's breast.
>
> (Canto III, st. cvii.)

Sentiment, I think, is the right word for the sympathetic emotion in this poem as a whole; for though he describes raptures galore, I do not feel that the emotional intensity of the

love scenes ever really rises to passion. Vivid and brilliant as is his imagination in the picturing of the relations of Juan and the pirate's daughter, the degree of intensity is lower than that exhibited on the satirical side of his work; and he damns the hypocrisy of the English with more real zest than he sings the charm of the lovely Greek. Take a stanza or two as near to the height of passion as the poem ever rises:

She loved, and was beloved — she adored,
And she was worshipp'd ; after nature's fashion,
Their intense souls, into each other pour'd,
If souls could die, had perish'd in that passion, —
But by degrees their senses were restored,
Again to be o'ercome, again to dash on ;
And, beating 'gainst *his* bosom, Haidée's heart
Felt as if never more to beat apart. . . .

And now 't was done — on the lone shore were plighted
Their hearts ; the stars, their nuptial torches, shed
Beauty upon the beautiful they lighted :
Ocean their witness, and the cave their bed,
By their own feelings hallow'd and united,
Their priest was Solitude, and they were wed :
And they were happy, for to their young eyes
Each was an angel, and earth paradise.

(Canto II, st. cxci, cciv.)

If the reader does not at once perceive the limitation in such passages as these which forces us to call the feeling they rouse in the reader sentiment rather than passion, let

him call to mind Shakespeare's treatment of the same theme (for, of course, Byron is seeking to describe passion in the lovers), and repeat to himself Juliet's lines beginning

> Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,

or Romeo's on his first sight of Juliet,

> O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright,

and the distinction here insisted on will become immediately apparent. Both Byron's and Shakespeare's stories end disastrously; but because of this difference Haidée's death closes a pathetic idyll, Juliet's a great tragedy.

There are several reasons why the non-satirical parts of *Don Juan*, like the romantic tales of Byron, fail to reach the level of the great poems of passion. One is that Byron's imagination, though active, was not capable of the loftiest flights, and did not operate with the intensity required to kindle his reader to the highest degree of rapture. Byron was surely a poet, and he was a great writer; but his greatness as a writer rests upon much besides purely poetical qualities. He is one more proof (as Landor, we saw, was also) that a theme dealing with passion, and a passionate personality in the poet, do not necessarily produce

passionate poetry. Another reason is the pervading spirit of satire in the poem as a whole. Through descriptions of scenery, wild adventure, and tender emotion, the satirical spirit is ever hovering in the background, never long out of sight. Byron had found out his sentimental weakness and, in his determination never to be laughed at for it again, he is prompt to laugh first. This had a good and a bad effect: the sentiment in *Don Juan* is never allowed to become sentimentalism; neither can it ever rise to genuine passion. A single instance will recall the almost mechanical device by which these results come about:

"Farewell, my Spain! a long farewell!" he cried,
"Perhaps I may revisit thee no more,
But die, as many an exiled heart hath died,
Of its own thirst to see again thy shore:
Farewell, where Guadalquiver's waters glide!
Farewell, my mother! and, since all is o'er,
Farewell, too, dearest Julia!" — (here he drew
Her letter out again, and read it through.)

"And oh! if e'er I should forget, I swear —
But that 's impossible, and cannot be —
Sooner shall this blue ocean melt to air,
Sooner shall earth resolve itself to sea,
Than I resign thine image, oh, my fair!
Or think of anything, excepting thee;
A mind diseased no remedy can physic" —
(Here the ship gave a lurch, and he grew sea-sick.)
(Canto II, st. xviii, xix.)

Sentimentalism and sustained passion are equally impossible in a tale narrated in this spirit and by these methods. By these methods, then, and at this cost, did Byron free himself from the vice of sentimentalism.

Before closing our discussion of this quality, it seems worth while to add a word on the relation of sentimentalism to what is known as sensationalism in art. We have seen that the former is due to the cultivation of the tender feelings for the sake of a personal emotional satisfaction; the latter is a parallel tendency which seeks emotional excitement by the cultivation of the grosser feelings. Not the pathos of delicate sensibility, but the shock from violent external incident is the material of the sensationalist. Horror, terror, frightful suspense, crude supernaturalism, bloodshed, crime, — these and their like does he accumulate, not in the realist's zeal to tell the whole truth about human life, nor in the romanticist's vision of the awe-inspiring elements which may form the motives or the consequences of human action; but in a determination to thrill at all costs. As a defective form of art, it is not fundamentally different from sentimental-

ism, in that it sacrifices truth and sincerity for the sake of emotional dissipation; only its methods are cruder and more violent, and it results psychologically not in the hypersensitiveness of the sentimentalist, but in the blunting of the very sensibilities which make its appeal possible. It thus soon defeats its own ends, and its periodic recurrences in the history of any art are likely to be short lived.

CHAPTER VIII

HUMOR IN POETRY

I

In several of the foregoing discussions, notably those on satire and on the correctives of sentimentalism, we have had occasion to touch on the element of humor. Enough has probably already been said in these connections to point to the desirability of some more detailed study of the general relations of poetry and humor. One approaches the subject with considerable hesitation, because, abundant as are the critical treatises on either subject, it is hard to find any serious attempt to deal with the one as an element in the other, or to discuss how the presence of humor affects the more constant and fundamental factors of poetry. On our previous topics there have been authorities whom we could follow when we saw fit; here we have not even any one to differ from.

In the use of the term "humor" hitherto, the orthodox view has been assumed, that its essence lies in the perception of incongruity, using this phrase in the widest possible sense.

I shall continue to make this assumption, and shall use the word to denote all the more important forms in which the ludicrous appears in literature. There is, of course, a more limited sense, in which humor is contrasted with wit, or with irony, or with satire; and in which geniality, or sympathy, or kindliness may be regarded as essentials; but for the present purpose we need the more comprehensive sense. Some of the finer distinctions may develop as we proceed.

The difficulty which first meets us may perhaps be best realized if the reader tries to call to mind a line of undoubted high poetic quality which is distinctly humorous, and in which the poetry and humor are not successive but interfused. It is not very hard to find humorous lines in good poetry, or poetical lines in humorous verse; but the single lines showing both qualities in a high degree and simultaneously is rarer. Such lists of examples of great poetry as Matthew Arnold's "touchstones" are useless here, and one will search volumes of "Poetic Gems" in vain. *As You Like It* is a brilliant example of a comedy abounding in both humor and poetry, but what line could be cited from it to illustrate both? Take

the most famous speech in it — that beginning, "All the world's a stage." It is spoken by Jaques, who is generally taken as a humorous character; and hardly any piece of poetry written by Shakespeare seems to have had a wider appeal. Its poetical merit consists in the series of vivid images of human types, brought before us in language of unsurpassable aptness and conciseness. It contains no lofty flight of the imagination: the general conception enclosing this series of images is the commonplace one of the world as a theatre, a comparison hackneyed centuries before Shakespeare, obvious to begin with, and never very true. Its humorous element lies in the ludicrous view of human nature presented to us: infant, schoolboy, lover, soldier, justice, pantaloon, dotard, — all appear more or less absurd, ridiculous because of some contrast between appearance and reality, all included in the general incongruity between such contemptible figures and the supposed dignity of human nature. The humor, that is, is the humor of cynicism, the favorite method of which is an exaggerated realism. A typical line is that on the lover:

> Sighing like furnace, with a woful ballad
> Made to his mistress' eyebrow.

The humor here is undeniable, but you would hardly quote it to show what you mean by high poetical quality.

Yet the consideration of this case may be made to throw light on the situation. The perception of incongruity involves, first, the use of our critical faculties, and of the rational and normal as standards of judgment. It is not likely then to be notably absent from poetry in which the rational element predominates; and, as a matter of fact, humor has flourished in classical periods. Thus there seems to be no antipathy between humor and that element of poetry we have called reason.

Again, a frequent source of humor is the incongruity between appearance and reality, between the pretence and the fact. A strong sense of fact, then, though by no means always accompanied by humor, is by no means incompatible with it. We have just seen Jaques producing his piece of cynical humor by holding up the unseemly facts of human life in implied contrast with our racial self-esteem, and earlier we discussed a triumph of humorous realism in *The Jolly Beggars*. Here also we find no antipathy between humor and that element of poetry we have called the sense of fact.

The most frequent literary form in which humor is a necessary component is Satire; and we have already seen that satire is sometimes characterized by a predominance of the rational, as in the satire of types; sometimes by a predominance of the realistic, as in the satire of individuals. But it has also been observed that satire is of all widely cultivated verse forms perhaps that which most often raises the question as to its right to be called poetry at all. The reason of this is, of course, its liability to be deficient in the remaining essential element, imagination: so that we have here an indication that the difficulty in finding short passages showing the co-existence of humorous and poetical qualities may lie in some peculiarity of the relation between imagination and the ludicrous.

The suggestion given here finds confirmation in the observation that characteristically romantic poets are apt to be very serious. Spenser, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, are all highly distinguished for their range and intensity of imagination: none of them is a humorist. Byron is; but we have already seen reason to question his claim to be regarded as primarily romantic, and to view him

as largely sentimentalist and realist. In his Oriental tales, and in *Childe Harold*, his most distinctively romantic work, there is rarely a glimpse of humor. We may, then, take it as fairly manifest that in poetry of the romantic sort, and especially where the imagination is of the creative kind and works intensely, humor is often absent.

The explanation of this has already suggested itself. The absorption of the artist's powers in the conceiving of large syntheses, the soaring into an ideal world where the activity of the reasoning and perceptive powers is subordinated to the imagination and reduced to a minimum, is usually incompatible with that critical detachment which is essential to the perception of the incongruous. We have insisted that in well-balanced poetry this predominance of the imagination should not be excessive, that the powers of reason and observation should not cease to be exercised; but in the instances of this combination previously analyzed, they are exercised as regulative and restraining forces, whereas in the form of humor they are apt to act as a sudden check, paralyzing for the moment the wings of imagination, and producing a disturbing effect

of anti-climax. This is precisely the result so often aimed at by Byron in *Don Juan*, with disastrous effect on the feelings of the reader who has unwarily abandoned himself to an imaginative flight, but for any one who has caught Byron's spirit, highly comic. This was illustrated in the stanzas quoted in the previous chapter. Another instance will be found in the lines beginning,

> 'T is sweet to hear
> At midnight on the blue and moonlit deep
> The song and oar of Adria's gondolier,
> By distance mellow'd, o'er the waters sweep.

Here for nearly three stanzas the poet passes before the mind's eye a succession of charming images, calling up a variety of pleasing sentiments, and he gives them imaginative unity by a certain similarity of tone. Then suddenly, with an apparent continuation of the same theme, comes a complete change of tone:

> Sweet is revenge — especially to women,
> Pillage to soldiers, prize-money to seamen.
> Sweet is a legacy — etc.
>
> (Canto I, st. cxxiii-cxxvi.)

From the enumeration of the sweet and tender pleasures that appeal to the finer elements in human nature we turn to an incongruous list of base and sordid satisfactions; we are

awakened with a jolt from an ideal reverie by the intrusion of realistic observations; we descend from poetry to satirical humor. Some stanzas contain both humor and poetry; but when the humor comes in, the poetry goes out.

II

The mutual exclusiveness of humor and imaginative poetry is not always so absolute as it is in such instances as these. When we do find them more intimately associated, so that no clear succession or alternation of moods like this in Byron can be detected, the humor is likely to be of that specific kind to which the meaning of the word is often limited, the genial humor that combines with the sense of the ludicrous an underlying sympathy; the humor which loses its venom, but not its point, because it involves a profound feeling of tenderness and tolerance for our common human nature. Shakespeare often exhibits this humor, and at times we find it in combination with true imaginative poetry.

> But man, proud man,
> Dress'd in a little brief authority,
> Most ignorant of what he 's most assur'd,
> His glassy essence, like an angry ape,

> Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
> As makes the angels weep; who, with our spleens,
> Would all themselves laugh mortal.
>
> (*Measure for Measure*, II, ii, 117.)

Such a speech as this, it is true, does not induce laughter; but it is suffused none the less with a keen sense of the incongruity between man's pretensions and the truth, and belongs to a well-recognized type of humor. It is not necessary to argue that it is lofty poetry. Furthermore, the imaginative element and the humorous do not play Box and Cox as in Byron, but coexist in the whole passage; and their harmony is made possible through the element of sympathy — in itself largely imaginative — which enriches the poetry, and lifts it above the level of ordinary satire that merely stings. More genial examples can be found in the works of Burns, the British poet who, outside of the drama, succeeds best, perhaps, in fusing the two elements under discussion. His *Tam o' Shanter* is an admirable example of imaginative realism suffused with humor, and in such a picture as that of the hero's home,

> Where sits our sulky, sullen dame,
> Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
> Nursing her wrath to keep it warm,

we have all the characteristic qualities of the poem illustrated in three lines. Another instance is in the bacchanalian song already quoted in another connection:

> It is the moon, I ken her horn,
> That 's blinkin in the lift sae hie;
> She shines sae bright to wyle us hame,
> But, by my sooth, she 'll wait a wee.

The half-drunken drollery of the stanza is irresistibly humorous; yet it contains also a distinct imaginative element, and that not purely recollective.

It is through this sympathetic element in humor, taking it for the time in the more special sense, that it is brought into its familiar relation with pathos. Besides surrounding and enveloping the perception of the incongruous with tolerance and kindliness, this sympathy opens the heart to feelings of compassion, and renders it more responsive when the images presented pull on the cords of association. This process is illustrated with especial frequency in poetry dealing with childhood, where the sources of humor and pathos lie very close together in the sense of the contrast between effort and accomplishment on the one hand, and pity for a helpless little

bit of humanity on the other. Shakespeare's treatment of children nearly always combines the two elements. Take, for example, the scene between Hubert and the little Prince Arthur in *King John:*

Arth. Must you with hot irons burn out both mine eyes?
Hub. Young boy, I must.
Arth. And will you?
Hub. And I will.
Arth. Have you the heart? When your head did but ache,
I knit my handkercher about your brows,
The best I had, a princess wrought it me,
And I did never ask it you again;
And with my hand at midnight held your head,
And like the watchful minutes to the hour,
Still and anon cheer'd up the heavy time,
Saying, 'What lack you?' and 'Where lies your grief?'
Or, 'What good love may I perform for you?'
Many a poor man's son would have lien still
And ne'er have spoke a loving word to you;
But you at your sick service had a prince.
(Act IV, sc. i, vv. 39 ff.)

With the sheer pathos of this passage is mingled a tender vein of humor in the little faults in taste of the boy, as when he shows how well he remembers his own kindnesses. In the treatment of the little princes in *Richard III*, of the young Martius in *Coriolanus*, and of the boy Mamilius in *Winter's Tale* we find this strain of wistful humor

reappearing amidst the terror or the sadness of the situation.

The effect of such humor is not, however, completely accounted for if we think of it as merely the result of the adding together of the usual reactions from the two elements of the humorous and the pathetic. It is not the sum but the product of the two qualities. In some types of cases, at least, there is a more subtle interaction, by which the specific effect which either element would produce in isolation is greatly intensified by the presence of the other. One of the elements seems to produce in the mind of the reader a degree of sensitiveness which makes it respond to the appeal of the other much more powerfully than it would do to it alone; and this service is reciprocal. Humor in such circumstances is much more keen; pathos gains poignancy, even from a mere jest.

"Courage, man," says Romeo to the wounded Mercutio; "the hurt cannot be much."

"No," answers the irrepressible gallant, "'t is not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door; but 't is enough, 't will serve. Ask for me to-morrow, and you shall find me

a grave man." The irony in the first sentence and the poor pun in the second, apart from the tragic situation, would be futile enough: in their setting, they outshine Mercutio's most brilliant repartees in the comedy scenes. On the other side, nothing could make the death of Mercutio more moving than that he should pass with a jest on his lips. Similar, but more terrible, is the use of the grotesque humor of Edgar and the Fool in the scene of the storm in *King Lear*, where the terror and pity of the situation are intensified by its flashes, as the darkness of that night is intensified by the lightning as it forks and quivers through the tempest. And even in the last scene it glimmers faintly but effectively in the gloom of a tragic close already well nigh intolerable.

III

We have come far from our original starting point of the apparent incompatibility of humor and imagination. In most cases we have seen that when the same line or phrase exhibited both elements in intimate relation, it was to be accounted for by the presence of the common element of sympathetic insight; but the examples last cited point to another class of

circumstances, where both elements are present and mutually strengthening, but where the field of operation is less restricted. This class calls for a more ample treatment.

Among the other limitations of Matthew Arnold's essay on *The Study of Poetry*, already discussed, is the neglect of the element of structure in art. One objection to the suggestion made above, that the reader should think of a line of verse at once pointedly humorous and highly poetic, applies also to his method of testing poetry in general by the style of the single line or short passage. The artistic quality, especially in classical art, resides as well in the whole design as in the workmanship of the detail: a piece of marble, or the carving on the capital of a column, is hardly sufficient evidence for judging the effect of a cathedral. Many a drama is a genuine poetic creation, although it may be simple to the point of baldness in diction, and exhibit the fundamental qualities of poetry only in the characterization and in the significance, proportion, and verisimilitude of the plot. It is not unconnected with the ignoring of this element by Arnold, that he has nothing to say of humor in his essay, and that he conse-

quently does such scant justice to Chaucer and Burns. For both the humor and the poetical quality of these authors are to be found often in the large conception rather than in the specific passage. Even in the Shakespearean passages just cited, these elements are felt only when one has a grasp on the situation or the character as a whole, and are by no means dependent on mere felicity of phrase. This is still more marked in the field of comedy. Falstaff is surely a vital poetical creation, intensely conceived and highly idealized; but it is not in the intention of the author to make him talk poetry, as, say, Perdita or Lear talks poetry.

Nor is this entirely to be accounted for by the fact that these are characters in drama, and must speak in character. The same thing holds of much of Chaucer, of the more realistic descriptions of the pilgrims in the *Prologue*, and of those tales that are especially humorous. In *The Jolly Beggars*, too, the "splendid and puissant" effect which Arnold felt, but did not analyze, is the result of the elevating of sordid realistic description through intense imaginative sympathy, combined with a buoyant hilarity. In such work both humor

and poetry need room, and we search it in vain for those

> jewels five-words-long
> That on the stretch'd forefinger of all Time,
> Sparkle forever.

IV

The form of humor known as irony has certain peculiarities that call for special treatment. The humorous element in irony lies in the incongruity between the apparent and the real. In irony as a mere figure of speech, the apparent is the superficial meaning of an utterance, the real is the hidden intention of the speaker. Thus in *Twelfth Night* (IV, i, 1), the Clown meets Sebastian and mistakes him for Cesario (*i.e.*, Viola), and the following dialogue ensues :

Clo. Will you make me believe that I am not sent for you ?

Seb. Go to, go to, thou art a foolish fellow; let me be clear of thee.

Clo. Well held out, i' faith! No, I do not know you ; nor I am not sent to you by my lady, to bid you come speak with her; nor your name is not Master Cesario; nor this is not my nose neither. Nothing that is so is so.

In such instances, the humor, such as it is, is obvious enough; but like the small boy's "You 're a dandy," it is used mainly for emphasis, and commonly has nothing to do with

poetry. Considerably more is involved in what is called the irony of events, or irony of circumstances. Here the incongruity lies in the contrast between the superficial reading of the trend of events, and the actual outcome, often thought of as predestined, in which case the phrase, "irony of Fate," is applied. Periods of great political turmoil, like the Wars of the Roses, or the French Revolution, are full of this kind of irony, cases in which the triumphal procession turns out to be a ride to disgrace or death. The old world is strewn with instances of monumental irony, trophies bearing inscriptions setting forth the invincibility of warriors who have long since met defeat. Dramatic irony is merely the result of a device by which the playwright arranges events with a view to this double interpretation, the *dramatis personæ* taking these events in one sense, while the audience knows that the reverse is the truth. The fifth act of *Romeo and Juliet* opens with a notable instance of this: Romeo is in Mantua, and with the following words opens the scene after that in which the Capulets have been mourning the death of Juliet, so that the audience is fully conscious of the desperate state of the case:

If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep,
My dreams presage some joyful news at hand.
My bosom's lord sits lightly in his throne,
And all this day an unaccustom'd spirit
Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts.
I dreamt my lady came and found me dead —
Strange dream, that gives a dead man leave to think! —
And breath'd such life with kisses in my lips,
That I reviv'd, and was an emperor.
Ah me! how sweet is love itself possess'd,
When but love's shadows are so rich in joy!

And while he speaks, his man Balthazar is at the threshold with the fatal news from Verona. This is a clear instance of dramatic irony of the tragic type. It can be reversed, and the character may anticipate an unfortunate ending, while the audience knows that things are after all to go well with him. Thus in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Silvia, who secretly returns the love of Valentine, has him write a love-letter on her behalf to a mythical rival, bids him keep it because it is not passionate enough, and amuses the audience with a double-edged dialogue until, with the aid of the clown, Valentine gradually realizes that his lady has been all the while making love to him through himself. This is dramatic irony of the comic type.

In these later instances, whether of the irony

of real events or of dramatic irony, we are much closer to poetry than in merely verbal irony; for a full appreciation of the humor, grim or pathetic or merry, calls for the exercise of the imagination in holding up for simultaneous observation the two pictures, the one that fills the eye of the victim, and the one that represents the truth. In the case of tragic irony especially, the humor tends to strengthen the effect of the fundamental tragedy in the situation, as we have just seen that more direct forms of humor do in other cases. Our emotion at the spectacle of Romeo, setting out on his fatal ride from Mantua to the tomb of Juliet, is made much more poignant by the dramatist's showing him buoyed up with a groundless exhilaration. It reminds us of the futility of human attempts to read the future; of the hopelessness of the strife between the individual and circumstance; and it raises the episode to the level of the universal.

Sunt lacrimae rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt.

We see, then, that in this form of irony also humor and imagination may unite to serve each other and to intensify the poetical effect. But it must at the same time be admitted that

much of the employment of this, as of other kinds of humor, is on a much humbler plane. Often it is merely verbal, and, as in the case of wit in the narrower sense of the word, while it may give point and increase the entertaining power of verse, it has nothing to add to its poetical quality. It may even be hostile to it, for it may provoke a mood incompatible with that which the essential qualities of poetry combine to induce.

Somewhat akin to irony is the element of humor in such satirical forms as the mock-heroic poem and the mock-epic. In these, the loftiness of style of the kind of poem burlesqued produces an expectation which is at once contradicted by the actual matter of the satire; and this incongruity is the source of the humor throughout. In this by itself there is little or nothing to contribute to poetical effect. The mock element is merely a comic framework; yet it may enclose poetry either in the direct satire, or in the imitation of the epic or heroic style in itself. This last is naturally rare and difficult, yet it was accomplished in the great close of Pope's *Dunciad*. Here the make-believe of the epic of Dulness seems finally to have taken possession of the

poet's imagination, an illusion of a higher kind of reality is produced, and a sort of poetic faith takes the place of the conscious hyperbole which has sustained the satire hitherto. Protest against stupidity is at last seen to be useless, and in a genuine imaginative flight the poet prophesies the final conquest of the universe by the enemies of light:

> In vain, in vain — the all-composing Hour
> Resistless falls : the Muse obeys the Pow'r.
> She comes ! she comes ! the sable Throne behold
> Of Night primæval and of Chaos old !
> Before her, Fancy's gilded clouds decay,
> And all its varying Rain-bows die away.
> Wit shoots in vain its momentary fires,
> The meteor drops, and in a flash expires.
> As one by one, at dread Medea's strain,
> The sick'ning stars fade off th' ethereal plain ;
> As Argus' eyes by Hermes' wand opprest,
> Clos'd one by one to everlasting rest ;
> Thus at her felt approach, and secret might,
> Art after Art goes out, and all is night.
> See skulking Truth to her old cavern fled,
> Mountains of Casuistry heap'd o'er her head !
> Philosophy, that lean'd on Heav'n before,
> Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.
> Physic of Metaphysic begs defence,
> And Metaphysic calls for aid on Sense !
> See Mystery to Mathematics fly !
> In vain ! they gaze, turn giddy, rave, and die.
> Religion blushing veils her sacred fires,
> And unawares Morality expires.
> For public Flame, nor private, dares to shine ;

Nor human Spark is left, nor Glimpse divine !
Lo ! thy dread Empire, CHAOS ! is restor'd ;
Light dies before thy uncreating word ;
Thy hand, great Anarch ! lets the curtain fall,
And universal Darkness buries All.

V

We may now sum up the relation of humor to the various types of poetry with which we have been mainly concerned.

In romantic poetry in general, poetry in which there is a marked predominance of imagination, we have found humor to be noticeably rare, so that in the leading romantic poets of the age of Wordsworth we have not been able to find illuminating examples. This has not been surprising. In real life every one has observed the absence of humor in people of a strongly romantic tendency; and, in our own romantic moods, our flights into ideal realms are apt to be checked by the intrusion of even a momentary glimpse of ourselves as ludicrous. If it is difficult, as the philosophers have always said, to be in love and to be wise, it is still more difficult to be a romantic lover and retain a sense of humor. For the more romantic a mood is, the more does the imagination soar above the hampering restrictions of the

reasonable, the traditional, and the actual; while one of the commonest sources from which humor springs is the contrast between the subjective imaginative view and the facts as presented by common sense.

In classical poetry this difficulty does not exist. The different aspects of what we have called the reason dominant in poetry of this type — the critical judgment, the sense of fitness, the feeling for restraint and moderation, the avoidance of excess, the harmony of means with ends, the respect for the normal, the tendency to follow tradition which has been tested by experience — these aspects remain uninjured by the power of perceiving the incongruous. Many of them, indeed, are such as to reinforce that power. It is natural, then, that in the poetry of classical periods humor should be much more abundant than in romantic periods. Writers greatly concerned with congruity in their work will be quick to perceive the incongruous, and to use it for ornament, for emphasis, and for relief. But in classical poetry imagination, though restrained, is not absent. It is only when the classical tendency runs to a vicious excess, when respect for tradition and the care for form

degenerate into mere convention and mannerism, that the balancing element of imagination is reduced to the vanishing point. Then humor is apt to assume some of the vitalizing functions of the lost imagination, and there results a superabundance of satirical writing, such as we find in the pseudo-classical verse of the eighteenth century. Yet even in this satire, when it has true classical quality, we have seen the possibility of the coexistence of humor and imagination, the imagination being already disciplined by common sense.

Realistic poetry, also, has no antipathy to the humorous. The fact, as well as the reason, affords a sharp contrast to man's vain imaginings and pretences; and realism, going about its own business, might be expected to stumble upon many instances of the humorous. If we are right in classifying the great mass of satire of the individual as realistic, in contrast with classical satire of the type, we have in our satirical poetry much more abundant examples of realistic than of classical humor. From Jonson and Dryden to Burns and Byron our literature is rich in close transcripts of actual persons and conditions, enlivened with a vast variety of humorous contrast. Here, as

in the neo-classical poetry, the danger is in the subsidence of imagination; but when it is present in sufficient force to dress the poetical balance, it has been shown here also to be compatible with humor.

There is another danger to which realistic humor, when satirical in purpose, lies peculiarly open. A constant weapon of satire is, of course, exaggeration; and exaggeration may be employed — and here imagination helps rather than hinders — for the production of genuinely humorous effect. But when the force behind the exaggeration is not imagination but merely malice and hatred, humor itself disappears, and satire sinks into bald invective.

Humor, in its perennial search for incongruity between appearance and reality, naturally finds a rich feast in the performances of the sentimentalist. To this tendency it is, for the most part, directly hostile and destructive; and society instinctively lays its hand on humor as the appropriate weapon in its conflict with this disease. But between wholesome sentiment and humor there is no such antagonism. In what has been said of the restricted meaning of humor, humor when it appears in

combination with a kindly and sympathetic attitude towards men and things, we have already indicated its power of harmonizing with genuine sentiment, and even of intensifying it.

It is mainly under this special aspect that humor enters into poetry of the first rank, poetry so exquisite in its balance that it is no longer fitly labelled with the name of any one tendency. Here, as we have seen, it is brought through the element of sympathy, into relation with imagination; and, in the greatest poetry, not with imagination tamed and shackled, but free and of infinite possibilities, yet controlled and directed by laws which it recognizes as beneficent.

CONCLUSION

THE topics enumerated in the program laid down in the first chapter have now been discussed; none of them has been exhausted. The central position, that the essential nature of poetry is complex, not simple, has, it is hoped, been made clear, since it is difficult to see how any of the fundamental factors we have examined can be denied a place in its constitution. Even if the definitions of these factors which have been proposed, and the illustrations of their manifestations which have been offered, may not always have carried conviction, the discussion need not have been futile, for we can be agreed upon the existence and the distinctness of two adjacent territories without being completely in harmony as to where at all points the boundary should run.

In accordance with the view stated at the outset, no attempt at a final definition of poetry has been made. The formula presented is only one of many ways that might be suggested of approaching the problems, practical and theoretical, which offer themselves for solution to the serious student of poetry. If

this formula is sound as far as it goes, it has some evident advantages. It gives an intelligible and consistent content to those hard-worked counters of the critical game, — romantic, classic, realistic, sentimental. This is done at the inevitable cost of narrowing here and there the field over which common usage has applied these terms; but such narrowing is justified if, as I think, nothing has been excluded which has not been shown to belong more appropriately elsewhere; and if the remaining content is a unified conception.

It makes it possible to use these terms impartially as describing a prevailing tendency, without implying that any of the tendencies, when properly balanced and restrained, is a symptom of decadence, or is in itself artistically vicious. It explains why, as one ascends in the scale of poetry, one is more and more reluctant to apply to the greatest achievements the names of any school or any movement, by showing that in this field, as in so many others, supreme excellence lies in perfection of balance.

Finally, it affords a point of view sufficiently elevated to enable the critic to survey all periods and all tendencies, to appreciate the enthusi-

asms and the preferences of each, as well as to recognize their excesses and their limitations.

Apart, however, from the finality, and even from the complete logical validity of such a view as I have been trying to expound, it may find a pragmatic defence, if I may use the slang of the hour, in its power of shedding illumination upon the poetry we read. Critical theory may be regarded either as an attempt to contribute to æsthetics as a branch of philosophy or psychology, as the laying of one stone in a theoretical construction of the universe; or as a means of clearing our vision and sharpening our sensibilities with a view to a more intense enjoyment of art. My interest has been chiefly in the latter. In the application of these theories to the work of the English poets, I have myself found my eyes opened not only to causes but to effects which had before been obscure or only half-consciously perceived; and in the abundant illustrations with which I have sought to water the dry places of the argument, it is hoped that the reader may find, not merely refreshment for the moment, but an increased and abiding sense of beauty.

A question naturally arises as to how, under

the definitions which have been proposed, we are to label the poetry of our own day; and a glance at this question may appropriately close the discussion.

The dominant intellectual interest of our time is, of course, scientific; and this fact would lead us naturally to look for the prominence in contemporary art of the element of truth to fact. In some fields, notably in fiction and the drama, this expectation is fulfilled. The names of Balzac, Flaubert, Maupassant, Zola, Ibsen, and Tolstoi, on the continent of Europe, of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy in England, of Howells and James in America, suggest how widely and under what a variety of phases, naturalistic, psychological, and sociological, has appeared the tendency to emphasize truth to actual experience in the artist's picture of life. Traces of the same influence are to be found in poetry, as, for instance, in some aspects of the work of Kipling; yet it can hardly be said that as yet this art has entered on a predominatingly realistic period. For in poetry, whether we regard the practice of the writers or the tastes of the readers, we are still in the romantic age. We have been trying in these discussions to main-

tain an attitude of detachment, and to acquire criteria that would yield us as just a judgment of the work of Jonson and Pope as of that of Scott and Tennyson; and with an effort we may have succeeded in keeping our expressed opinions free from personal and contemporary bias. But since the reassertion of the place of imagination, now more than a hundred years ago, this quality has come more and more to be taken for granted as, in a special sense, *the* essential of poetry. We have suffered, and we suffer still, from a defect of the classical qualities, both in creation and in appreciation: we have much to gain from a greater reverence for tradition, a finer sense of the beauty of restrained and regulated form, a more rigorous intellectual discipline. But since we do not yet seem prepared to reach and to maintain ourselves upon the mountain top of perfect proportion, since we needs must belong to a party and find our inspiration in a one-sided view of truth, I cannot feel it is so unfortunate as some have found it that the dominant element in the poetry which most powerfully appeals to our generation is that of imagination. In an age when the progress of man's conquest of nature has brought him to a con-

dition where the senses are wooed ever more and more insistently and seductively, when the house of a man's soul is cumbered with the abundance of the things that he possesseth, when the multifarious Actual clamors for our attention with a thousand tongues, when contemplation is an impossibility and leisure a dream, in such an age it is well that when we turn to poetry for solace and refreshment, we should find it animated by that faculty that can

> Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
> Our noisy years seem moments in the being
> Of the eternal Silence.

THE END

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